

RUGBY ARIZONA CONSTITUTION

Including

By-Laws and Policies/Procedures

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

**Proposed at 2021 AGM
Based on 27 June 2020 Revised Document**



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PROPOSED AMENDMENT 1

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16.0 DISCIPLINARY GUIDELINES

For general disciplinary policies and procedures refer to ~~Superseded by separate document:~~ Rugby Arizona Disciplinary Committee Policy and Procedures, which superseded this document.

16.1. DISPUTE PROCESS

16.1.1 Creation and Process

RugbyAZ shall create a dispute mechanism to effectively adjudicate and resolve complaints and grievances as may arise from time to time between and among members, with such mechanism to be managed by the Disciplinary Committee. The Disciplinary Committee may create and appoint an independent panel or group to address any grievance between members. If the grievance directly or indirectly involves a member of the Management Team, or is not satisfactorily resolved through the dispute mechanism, the issue may be elevated to the appropriate authority.

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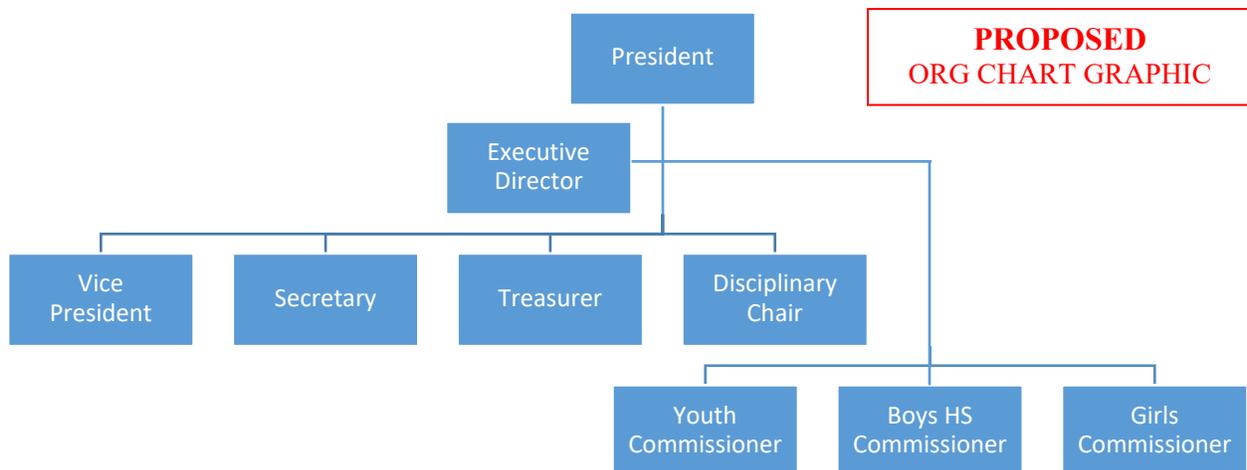
POLICIES/PROCEDURES OF RUGBY ARIZONA

13.0 RUGBY ARIZONA OPERATING STRUCTURE

The RugbyAZ mission is to promote and grow the game of rugby for the enjoyment of all. This structure provides guidelines and a mechanism to enable everyone to play an enjoyable and safe game of rugby.

13.1 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

RugbyAZ is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Executive Officers of the organization together with the Division Representatives form the Management Team, and are supported by the Executive Director (ED) and the Disciplinary Chair. The Management Team shall be responsible for the “day to day” administrative business of RugbyAZ, and any operational decisions of a material nature will be made by majority vote of the Management Team, such as the need may arise. There shall be at least three Division Representatives: a Youth Commissioner, a Boys High School Commissioner, and a Girls Commissioner. These roles may be filled by representatives of the Full Member Clubs.



13.2 SPECIFIC ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to the general duties for Executive Officers as described in the Constitution, there are specific responsibilities for officers to facilitate the successful day to day operation of RugbyAZ.

13.2.1 Vice President

Responsible for setting the Rugby Calendar and working with the ED to set all league schedules. Responsible for event planning for the major events on the Rugby Calendar (e.g. Devils Cup 7s, Rugby Bowl Finals, All-Star matches) and working with the ED to ensure successful execution of the Rugby Calendar.

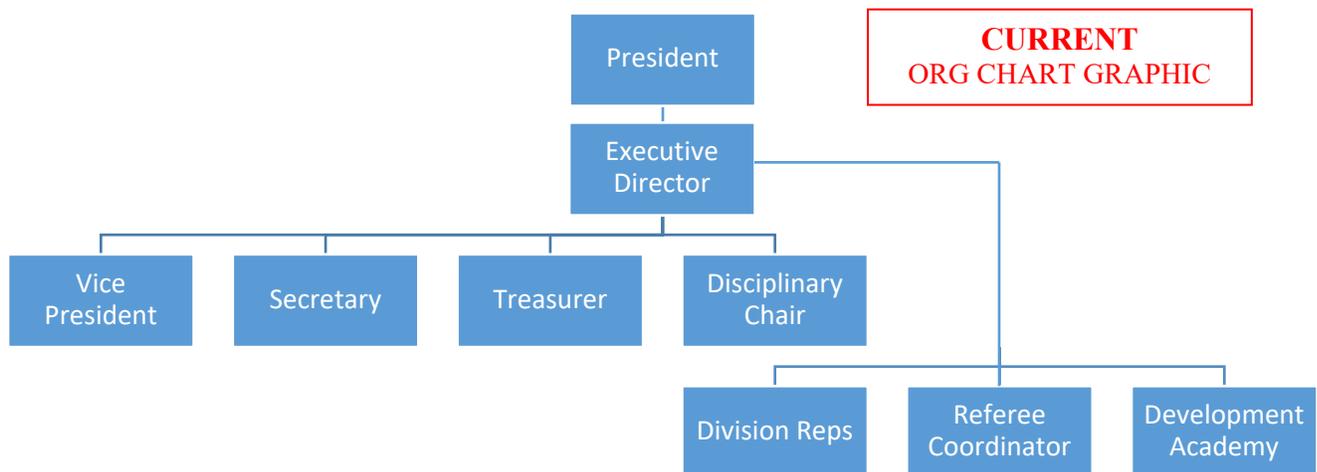
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15.1.7 Rugby Arizona Background Screening

RugbyAZ requires ~~Club officials, defined as their Coaches, Referees, and Assistant Coaches~~ the Executive Director to have successfully passed the RugbyAZ Background Screening process in order to ~~participate in RugbyAZ activities~~ be hired as an independent contractor. Background screening by RugbyAZ will be waived should the Executive Director applicant have successfully passed the USA Rugby background screening performed for the current registration cycle upon hire.

~~RugbyAZ will pay for the first 2 people per club per division (Youth, HS Boys, HS Girls) for the Clubs. Clubs will be responsible for paying for additional staff. CIPPed Level 200 Coaches and Level 1 Referees already get a background check through USAR so are not required to do it again. People with suitable alternative background checks, eg. State or Federal, are not required to do it again.~~

Rationale:

USA Rugby performs background screening upon registration.

RugbyAZ has not performed background screening for coaches, referee and assistant coaches since this amendment was approved.

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7.0 FINANCES

7.1 INCOME OF RUGBYAZ

The income of RugbyAZ shall come from:

1. The subscription of Full and Associate members.
2. Any net profit (after payment of all proper and relevant outgoings and expenses) that is due to RugbyAZ by prior agreement and is derived from any tournament, match, or other function organized by RugbyAZ in cooperation with any other not-for-profit group.
3. Any grants, subscriptions, or donations provided that they are made in such a way that their disposal is fully under the control of RugbyAZ.

7.2 DISSOLVING THE FINANCES OF RUGBYAZ

In the event that it becomes desirable to discontinue the activities of RugbyAZ as presently constituted, this can be done by a 2/3 majority vote of the Executive Committee.

Upon the dissolution of this corporation, assets remaining shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose. Any such assets not so disposed of shall be disposed by a Court of Competent Jurisdiction of the county in which the principal office of the organization is then located, exclusively for such purposes or to such organization or organizations, as said Court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

7.3 AUDITING THE FINANCES OF RUGBYAZ

For RugbyAZ Bank Accounts, the President and the Treasurer shall be the co-signatories on RugbyAZ bank account. RugbyAZ bank accounts may be audited every year by an independent 3rd party.

Proposal

7.4 FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year for RugbyAZ is based on the annual USA Rugby registration cycle, Sept 1 to Aug 31.

7.5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMPENSATION

The Executive Director (ED) will work as a part-time, non-benefitted independent contractor for RugbyAZ. RugbyAZ will provide the ED with IRS Forms 1099-NEC and 1096.

Salary for the ED:

1. The annual salary of the ED is based upon annual registration of players with RugbyAZ, calculated as \$25 per player registered to a tackle division in the Youth and High School divisions.
2. Any changes in the amount of compensation of the ED will be voted upon by 2/3 majority vote of the Executive Committee.
3. Funding obtained from RugbyAZ registration of the following categories will not be designated toward the salary of the ED: Administrators, Coaches, Referees and Rookie Rugby (Youth Non-Contact) Players.
4. Salary of the ED is not guaranteed.
5. The total amount of annual compensation of the ED may differ as the number of registered Youth Tackle and High School players cannot be anticipated or guaranteed.
6. The budget of the ED will be calculated from the average of the prior three year registrations of tackle Youth and High School players.
7. A baseline salary will be listed in the current job description of the ED. The amount will be calculated as follows: 2/3 of the average of the total registration of tackle Youth and HS players for the prior 3 years, multiplied by \$25. This sum will be divided equally for the fiscal year (Sept 1- Aug 31) to be issued in bi-weekly payments.
8. Salary payment will be issued bi-weekly (every two weeks) by manual or bank issued check. Any applicable fees for direct transfers, such as Zelle, made to the ED will be absorbed by the ED.
9. Salary of the ED will be pro-rated to the length of contract with RugbyAZ within the current fiscal year. Should the ED work less than 12 months of the current fiscal year, the total amount of compensation will be pro-rated accordingly.
10. Any additional salary generated above the baseline listed in the job description will be pro-rated to the length of contract with RugbyAZ of the current fiscal year.
11. Any additional salary generated above the baseline listed in the job description will be paid at the end of the current fiscal year.
12. Should a vacancy of the ED position occur within the current fiscal year, the funding designated for ED compensation will be pro-rated accordingly and credited to the general income for RugbyAZ budget.

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Proposal: Amend Current 1v1 Ruck Rule in Youth Tackle

To be presented and voted on at the Rugby Arizona Youth AGM on July 10, 2021

Goals: Modify an inhibitive rule that doesn't necessarily make youth rugby safer; Keep breakdown area safety in mind with a more reasonable rule for realistic rugby and prepare players for the next level

Current Rule:

- Only 1 player from each team is allowed to enter into a ruck

Proposed Change:

- Attacking side should be allowed to support (+1 only) a teammate or teammates after a ruck has formed, particularly if losing the battle to secure the ball; Possession should be a natural advantage
- Defense, or counter ruck, can match the attacking side's number; i.e. 2v2, 3v3, etc, but never have more in the ruck than the attacking side; Matching should be the defense's natural opportunity
- Rucks should still initially form only as 1v1; Two or more players from the same team, attack or defense, should not be allowed to enter the breakdown together

Concern

The rule put in place a few years ago does not make the breakdown area safer, especially for youth. When taken advantage of, it is even less safe for smaller, unsuspecting players.

1v1 rucks teach a bad habit (hesitation in support) on the attack side and discourages the critical rugby skill and attribute of support. This also leads to more dangerous play 1-2 years later for some when they move up to U14, where no semblance of this rule exists.

1v1 also encourages bad behavior (shoulder charging, pushing with extended arms, etc) on the defensive side, or counter-ruck, especially when the rule is taken advantage of by some teams or players. Some teams have taught and used bigger players to "blow up" the ruck when they know they have a size advantage.

Observations

It has been seen from the very first year, at times, that some bigger players are assigned the counter-ruck as a very specific role. In addition to their size advantage, which is perfectly fine, some still use their shoulders-only to initiate contact, extended arms to push, and more, to further dominate a breakdown area. 1v1 exacerbates the danger.

Furthermore, it has been observed that 1v1 is frustrating for experienced refs who want to apply the letter of the law, but know the spirit of it is counterintuitive. Lately, 1v1 has been an over-focus by inexperienced refs who overlook critical infractions like entering from the side, shoulder-charging, landing on their hands, playing the ball in contact, etc. Two teammates in a ruck, especially if it's a proper form of support, should not supersede those other infringements. Those create messier and more dangerous rucks than 2v2.

Arguments

- The 1v1 rule was added purely by convention and generic precaution; Only put in place as an existing rule from a set of youth rules borrowed from other regions. It was not implemented via necessity or cause-and-effect from an existing problem or specific incident.

Arguments (cont'd)

- The vast majority of attack players in the ruck are no threat. They are either setting a stationary position early or arriving late and of little consequence after a turnover. The more dangerous force in a ruck is predominantly from the counterruck where the intent is to win possession they do not currently have. This puts an isolated attack rucker at greater risk, especially when the counter-rucker knows they cannot gain further support.
- The format is 7s rugby. There is usually little time for multi-player rucks to form. There are only 7 players a side. There is no game-play advantage to adding players to the ruck other than support. Bodies are typically needed to attack and defend open space. 1v1 never should have been a concern in the first place. If we played youth 15s, a similar topic may be necessary due to the potential of bigger, messy pile-ups.
- At two different youth rugby clinics put on locally by professional organizations, it was observed that the high-level coach struggled to teach U10/U12 players how to support in a ruck. When that coach asked why this was such a struggle, they were told that our youth league has this 1v1 ruck rule. The paraphrased, but very similar response by each coach, independently, was "That's more unsafe."

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4. Under 14: Co-ed Touch, Boys Tackle

High School Boys Division Representative (Boys High School Commissioner)

1. Under 16: Co-ed Touch, Boys Tackle
2. High School: Co-ed Touch, Boys Tackle

Girls Division Representative (Girls Commissioner)

1. Under 14: Girls Tackle
2. Under 16: Girls Tackle
3. High School: Girls Tackle

Division Reps serve a 1 year term and are elected at each AGM.

Division Reps work with the ED for the successful execution of all the events on the Rugby Calendar each year. They are the first point of contact for the coaches of the teams playing in their Division to deal with availability, scheduling, referee assignments, and any general issues that crop up.

13.2.6 Development Academy

Responsible for rugby outreach, raising awareness and growing exposure to the game outside of RugbyAZ organized league schedules. This includes, but is not limited to, organizing camps and clinics to new and existing players, covering all the variants of rugby offered by RugbyAZ.

This is a shared resource for all the Members of RugbyAZ and can be utilized for assistance with Club practices as well as Club recruiting, and is a resource to the Select Side programs.

13.3 TACKLE RUGBY SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

Non-contact variations of rugby are already designed to be inclusive and safe for all. Tackle rugby requires Members to follow RugbyAZ and USA Rugby guidelines that are designed to improve safety and enjoyment for all. Clubs that try to game the system for the sole intent of winning are not in line with the RugbyAZ goals and will not be viewed favorably.

- We play co-ed tackle for U10 and U12 divisions.
- We play separate boys and girls tackle for U14, U16, HS.
- We are primarily an age-grade based league for tackle.
- ~~– The weight charts for youth rugby are a secondary measure for safety considerations. Players over the weight limit for their age grade must play up to the next age grade if deemed ability safe appropriate by the Division Reps, ED, and DC Chair. Any overweight player who is deemed appropriate to remain in the current age division must wear an arm band while on the field.~~
- ~~– Waiver requests are reviewed by the relevant Division Reps, ED and DC Chair.~~
- The weight charts are a backup factor used to assess waiver requests.

13.3.1 Waiver Guidelines

Player safety is the number one parameter for considering waivers. Safety to the other players and to the waived player themselves. Rugby athleticism and ability to safely physically

compete at the higher level is the second parameter. Technical playing skill is not a parameter. Players requesting waivers shall meet the following criteria:

1. Overweight for their age-appropriate division.
2. Significantly underweight for their age appropriate division
3. Special needs athletes

13.3.2 Waiver Review Board (WRB) structure

The WRB shall consist of the following members:

- Executive Director
- Vice President of RAZ
- Commissioners of each division
- Senior referee as needed.

The WRB is co-Chaired by the Executive Director and the Vice President of Rugby Arizona. The commissioner of each division is involved for the review of their division's waivers. A senior referee may be consulted for player evaluation as deemed necessary by the co-Chairs.

13.3.3 Waiver Review Process

Fall Season: Waiver and player are to be brought to the RAZ tent before that player plays their first match for that division. ED/VP to weigh player and assess player for safety in the desired division. RAZ understands the fluid nature of the fall season and will seek to be available as new players are introduced to the sport. Fall waivers do not carry over to spring season.

Spring season: Waiver requests to be emailed to ED/VP/Division commissioner by the last Friday before match play for pre-review. Waiver and player are to be identified at pre-match check in on the first weekend of match play. Division Commissioners begin evaluation process with ED/VP as schedule permits. Evaluations are carried out promptly on the first weekend of match play. Sufficient review shall include, but is not limited to, discussions with the senior referee or referee coach of the review match, and the opposition coach, and consist of watching at least one quarter of match play. Players requesting waivers shall be identified by orange arm bands before start of play. Waivers will generally be granted/denied by end of day on the date of review.

13.3.4 Extended Review Process

The WRB reserves the right to execute a continued review of players that challenge the parameters of waiver guidelines. The continued review consists of a second assessment during the following weekend's matches. WRB reserves the right to request weigh ins or assessments of new or existing players for the remainder of that season. Additional assessments shall be at the discretion of the ED/VP.

13.3.5 Appeal Process

Waiver denials must be appealed before Wednesday of the following week after match play. Mediation of waiver appeals will be conducted by the RAZ President and the DC Chair. They will both review any correspondence/data prior to the next scheduled match. Appealing players shall be reviewed for one full match by the RAZP and DC Chair, and the decision on the appeal is final.

13.3.6 Sliding weight scale

The maximum weight threshold allowed for each division is as follows. Players weighing more than this threshold are not eligible to be considered for a waiver.

	<u>Standard Max Weight (lbs)</u>	<u>Waiver threshold Max Weight (lbs)</u>
U10:	105	130
U12:	135	165
U14:	165	200

13.3.7 Limitations

- 1. Teams may only have one arm banded player on the field in a match played on a half-sized field.**
- 2. Teams may have up to 2 arm banded players on a match played on a full-sized field. A team may field no more than one extra arm banded player than the opposite team at the start of the match. E.g., if one team has no arm banded players, the opposition team can only field a maximum of one arm banded player.**
- 3. Waivered players may only play in matches in the division they are waived into.**
- 4. Waivered players may move up in divisions at coach's discretion but doing so voids their waiver into the lower division.**
- 5. Players joining teams later in the season must submit waivers to the WRB prior to their first match played. The assessment process will follow standard protocol.**
- 6. Arm bands shall be limited to officially waived players only.**
- 7. Discovery of players in matches without division appropriate waivers will result in immediate forfeiture of that match and any matches the player participated in during RAZ seasonal match play. Additional sanctions may be imposed by the Disciplinary Committee.**
- 8. Waivers are enforced during RAZ sanctioned events only. Participation in events outside RAZ sanctioned events shall default to USARUGBY guidelines.**

13.3.8 Other Considerations

1. All players are designated to their appropriate age-grade tier: Under 8, Under 10, Under 12, Under 14, Under 16, HS. The tiers are defined by age as of Sept 1 of the start of the Rugby Calendar.
2. USA Rugby requirement is that 8th graders and below are not allowed to play HS tier. This means that U14 players are not allowed to play HS. They ARE allowed to play U16. Any candidates for a high performance exemption waiver must be approved by the Executive Officers.
3. A player is allowed to "play up" from their defined age-grade tier on an ad-hoc basis and still remain in their primary tier. This means U14 can play up to U16, U16 can play up to HS, etc, and still play in their primary age tier each week.
4. Clubs must follow the RugbyAZ table of maximum weight limits for the U10, U12, U14 tackle tiers. Players that weigh above the limit should be playing in the next higher tier or wear an arm band after review of the player's abilities. Waiver requests to keep them in their age tier must be approved by the relevant Division Reps, ED, and DC Chair. Clubs are required to keep rosters of players current and available on match day and be able to answer any inquiry from another Club, referee or RugbyAZ official regarding player age or weight.
5. Safety consideration for light players: Where a Club Coach has first observed an underweight player playing in their proper age bracket and determines from a safety point of view that the player is undersized and there is a player well-being safety risk, the Club can submit a waiver request to have that player be allowed to play down the next lower age bracket. Waiver requests will be measured against the RugbyAZ table of threshold weights. Age waivers for over-age

players to play down a division who are also over the weight limit are not allowed for SRO league matches or SRO sponsored tournaments.

6. Maximum Number of Waivered Players on the field: A team may only have a maximum of two (2) waivered players on the field playing in a game at any time. Waivered means weight or age waiver. Penalty for violating includes up to forfeit of the game.

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PROPOSAL:

1. To completely remove the evaluation segment from our waiver process.

It has proven during the past 6+ years of RAZ that this is the most controversial discussion every season. Thus, the proposal to remove.

REASONS:

- a) We should not discriminate against players because of their weight and sometimes their athleticism.
- b) Per our constitution; section 13.3; it states, **“we are primarily an age-grade based league for tackle.”**
 - 1) And therefore, we should allow all players to play in their respective age-appropriate group.
 - 2) I know weight was added as a second measure for safety consideration, but we all know we still allow certain over-weight players to remain in the same age group.
 - 3) And this has caused a lot of anxiety and problems throughout the years because we still allow other over-weight player to play and not others.
 - 4) This also caused the clubs and the union to lose players.
- c) The “EVALUATION” process continues to be very flawed as there are no solid requirements, criteria and/or guidelines to follow.
- d) As a result, it was all subjective in nature without any way to measure eligibility.
 - 1) So if the evaluator is a non-experience volunteer, then the evaluation is very unfair.
 - 2) If the evaluation was completed due a match where the other team is very week, some players will perform like superstars whereas when they play against other teams that are similar in experience and size, then players are evenly matched and none will stand out as too good for the group.
- e) For the past 6+ seasons there has not been any known major injury or safety issue caused by any of the over-weight players during RAZ sanctioned events.
- f) Part of the evaluation is based how good and athletic a player is. That is wrong because it means that we’re penalizing players because they’re good and athletic. We need to encourage hard work and extra effort to get better instead of penalizing those great values.
- g) In fact, there are no bases for an evaluation as mentioned already.
- h) “MONEY”.
 - 1) Each player and their parents pay the same amount of money and it is very unfair when moving players up a division who end up not playing because they’re not mentally ready for an older age group.
 - 2) The best recruiting effort is through current players and their friends if their friends are wrongfully forced to move up then our player interest will suffer.
 - 3) If we continue down this path, we will continue to lose player interest.
- i) The introduction of allowing only 2 waived players in a match for U14 10s, and 1 for U12 7s added an extra layer of safety for all players.
 - 1) This way one team does not overload 6 or 7 big players smashing smaller players during a match and making the game unfair and/or unsafe.

- j) "SAFETY" as a talking point regarding this waiver process has proven negative. Unsafety conditions is not due to the difference in weight. If it was then why does U16 and HS have no weight limit? Safety is due to player coaching and education in how they play. Their form is very important and play a vital role in injuries. Rugby rules are there for safety, such as high tackles, shoulder charge, no wrap tackles, tip tackles, no tackle while player in the air, etc, etc. If all players follow the rules, rugby will be a lot safer. And not eat less so they're not over-weight. Keep in mind the weight limit is just an arbitrary number.

SUMMARY:

Base on the reasons stated above, I believe that allowing the following will greatly improve youth rugby in Arizona. And eliminate the most frustrating issue we face each year regarding the waiver process.

1. Allow all age-appropriate players to remain in their grade regardless of weight.
2. For U14 10s tackle, only allow 2 over-weight players on the field during a match.
3. For U12 and under 7s tackle, only allow 1 over-weight player on the field during a match.
4. If both teams/coaches agree to allow more than the minimum number of over-weight players, then the referee of the match needs to be notified.
5. If one team has less or no over-weight player on their roster, the opposing team does not have to remove their allowable or minimum number of over-weight players.
6. Identifying of over-weight players is done by wearing a Rugby Arizona provided arm-band.
7. It is the responsibility of the coaches to monitor and make sure the number of over-weight players on the field do not exceed the allowable number for their match.
8. The referee will not be responsible for policing over-weight number of players
9. However, the referee has the power to stop the match and remove the extra over-weight player when it occurs.
10. Play resumes immediately with a free kick to the non-offending team after the extra over-weight player is removed.
11. The penalized team can replace their extra over-weight player with a non-over-weight player, but the match will not be stopped to wait for the penalized team to replace the player.

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Proposal: Allow More Than 2 Overweight Players in U14 10s Under Excessive or Strained Conditions

To be presented and voted on at the Rugby Arizona Youth AGM on July 10, 2021

Goals: Prevent unsafe conditions when subs are limited, when there are more overweight players than sub spots and when scrums are inexperienced or undersized, especially late in matches or when it's hot

Current :

- Only 2 overweight players allowed on the field; New proposal pushes for even tighter restrictions that could make front rows and scrums even more dangerous

Proposed Change:

- It should be a moot point if we eliminate armbands and vet players better, but if nothing else changes, we should allow more than 2 overweight players for wiggle room with props and scrums whenever there are no subs to maintain a safe front row, a full scrum or 10 players on the field

Concern / Argument

The single biggest argument against the 2 overweight player limit on the field is that it contradicts one of the biggest safety measures World Rugby has pursued in the last few years. That being the specificity around front row player safety, where they made unique clauses for substitutions and strict requirements about numbers of experienced players available. At U14 we play 10s on a full field. At U12 and younger we play 7s. There is no advantage to playing more overweight kids, but at least at younger ages they have uncontested or smaller scrums and fewer weight differential issues. At times in 10s, the bench and player position dynamics require certain kids to be on the field. Situations came up more than once this past year at U14, where abiding by the rule meant playing short handed or with underweight, inexperienced scrums. How does that make the game safer? A full field of kids, in proper positions, with subs seems like the best mode for safety. These rules and restrictions contradict that. New proposals want to make it worse by suggesting that you can only match what the other team has, at 2 overweight players on the field or less. What if you have 2, 3 or more overweight players and the other team has none? Do they not play at all? Do you play only backs in your scrum?

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Proposal: Reinstate Waivers to Play Down Undersized, Inexperienced Players

To be presented and voted on at the Rugby Arizona Youth AGM on July 10, 2021

Goals: Allow for eval of underweight players to help level out anomalies in the overweight player debate

Current Scenario

- We voted to eliminate waivers to play down; This merely aids the current weight discrepancies

Proposed Change:

- Reinstate waivers for qualifying undersized players to play down; Properly examine and vet them

Argument

Two years ago we voted almost unanimously to eliminate waivers that allowed undersized older players to play down, effectively forcing some vulnerable kids to play against the supposedly dangerous overweight players. If the overweight player is a threat, why did we do that? Bringing this back and preventing abuse of it may help ease the concern of overweight players who shouldn't move up.

Rough Draft Concept of a Progression of Questions to Initiate, Qualify and Quantify Player Evaluations and Consider if They Should Move Down a Division

Undersized: Should the Player Move Down?

Questions	Response	Actions to Consider
Is the player under the recommended max weight for the division below their age and do they warrant a waiver to play down?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	If yes, put them on the radar to be evaluated. However, if they don't meet subsequent criteria, they are most likely a liability in a lower division and probably shouldn't move down.
Is the player in the younger or 1st year of their normal age-grade division?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	If yes, this adds value to the possibility of moving down. However, if they are older or do not meet other subsequent criteria, they may not be a candidate to move down.
Does the player have less than 2 completed years of experience in tackle rugby?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	If yes, this adds more value to the possibility of moving down. However, if they do not meet the next criteria, they still may not be a candidate to move down.
Is the player average or less in these athletic attributes for the age-grade below? Check each box to the right that applies:	Average or less <input type="checkbox"/> Speed <input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Agility	If yes to 2 or more, and 2 or more of the preceding criteria are also met, the player is likely a candidate to move down a division.

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Based on 27 June 2020 Revised Document**



Proposal: Eliminate Armbands in Youth Tackle; Thoroughly Evaluate Player Weight, Experience, Ability via a Criteria Checklist to Determine if They Should Move Up a Division

To be presented and voted on at the Rugby Arizona Youth AGM on July 10, 2021

Goals: Create an evaluation system for overweight and underweight players to help level out anomalies, instead of treating entire segments of players as one issue with one solution; Eliminate the arm-band concept that sends multiple damaging messages

Proposed Changes:

- Eliminate armbands except to identify players during short-term evaluation
- Establish an order of criteria (4 questions) to thoroughly determine if an overweight or underweight player needs to be further scrutinized in order to move up or down, or not

Concern

The existing system does little to nothing to evaluate players or the issues. A recent committee formed to address this area made little to no attempt to improve the evaluation process. Instead, they suggest more band-aid solutions, further misidentify real problems and magnify exclusion like the current system.

We currently identify overweight players by an arbitrary, black and white, subjective number. Two pounds of difference between two nearly identical players can change the entire outlook of their evaluation, while also inhibiting self-esteem, confidence and growth of young players - let alone opportunities to play. These are the most impressionable ages for most players and we're sending them the wrong message.

One pound under and they're apparently safe; one pound over and they're apparently significantly more dangerous. There needs to be a smarter and more effective process to evaluate and adjudicate while being as inclusive as possible to a diverse range of players and clubs.

Observations

Overweight players from team to team, club to club are very different. Some are the best players and/or very experienced, while others are the worst players and/or very inexperienced. These kids should not filter down to the same evaluation result, but currently are all deemed the exact same risk, and will continue to be, or worse.

It seems like the safety of U10 and U12 players would normally be paramount, yet the controversies and discussions have mostly revolved around the U14 boys division, and yet not with U14 girls. There is a reason for this. There is more significant change in body types and growth rates for boys at that age, as well as a greater chance of mixing new players with players who could have up to six years of tackle experience.

This may seem like an argument for changes that focus on weight maxes to preemptively avoid injuries, but it really shows why a better evaluation process is critical and why there needs to be more options, concepts and realistic changes that help balance the equation.

Arguments

- We approach overweight kids with a guilty-until-proven-innocent mindset. “They are a danger to others whether we know they are or not.” That is just a lazy or non-existent evaluation. Why have evaluations at all? Instead of questioning our effort to find avenues for kids to play rugby, we simply question the kids on a one-dimensional scale and identify them with a neon fabric. Other proposals want to just do more of that and make it even more stringent. “Why evaluations?” seems to be an answer not a question in proposals to make restrictions even more absolute, to spotlight-shame youth even more, and effectively cancel big kids from playing rugby. Some of these kids are the ones who need more playing time and experience to get in shape and build their confidence. We’re going the wrong direction. Furthermore, if smaller players want to get better they have to know how to play with and against bigger players. This hurts small players too and sends them the wrong message as well.
- Armbands are a horrible concept for long-term assessment. They have a discriminating, labeling feel like the Scarlet Letter or the Nazi’s yellow star badge. When I see orange armbands on the field I see a crutch, not a solution. I see us making a spectacle of kids, not isolating threats for a critical evaluation. To add insult, the league incredulously asked clubs or kids to pay for armbands - something the league arbitrarily created, unwanted but enforced, and had no system for tracking other than to write club abbreviations on them and say to clubs, “you manage it, you figure it out, but don’t lose it.” All in a year when clubs lost players and money, but the league ended in a surplus. It was discussed at the prior AGM that if clubs lost them they’d have to pay for new ones. We turned ours in the previous year, but they weren’t given back. Yet, we were treated like villains when we didn’t have them on hand.
- Certain injuries are used to make an opposing case. Here’s a different perspective of two cases:
 - **Braeden - Alexander:** The first ever youth tackle game. Braeden (a big kid) broke the leg of a small kid (Alex). Other than the ref, Jeff, I had one of the best views of this incident. I heard the break and even said out loud that Alex broke a bone. I was standing next to his dad, who replied to the contrary and said Alex was fine. The mistakes made by Alex and his coaches, combined with the perfect form-tackle by Braeden was likely going to end in that break even if Alex was 30 lbs heavier and Braeden 30 lbs lighter. Weight certainly ensured the break, but how Alex landed had everything to do with the break. If his legs didn’t cross, that break doesn’t happen. Not only that, Braeden was aging up to U16 the following year and later became a USA select player, while Alex was very underweight and likely U12 at the time, which we didn’t have yet. The next division down was U11 Touch at the time. So, every aspect of that incident was an anomaly. Braeden didn’t move up the remainder of that year and he didn’t injure anyone else.
 - **Deirdre’s son:** I didn’t witness the incident this season, but every person I spoke to who did said his arm got caught in an awkward position. Many believe it would’ve broken or at least been badly injured regardless of the defender’s size. Regardless, what happens if this occurs with the same two players only 1-2 years later in U16? What explanation or recourse do we have then? At some point we must accept this is a contact sport with unpreventable injuries.
- Do broken bones or serious injuries occur in HS between players with the same weight differential that exists in U14? If so, why aren’t we concerned? If not, why doesn’t it happen? It seems nobody wants to ask these questions or try to understand this. We already have 15 year old boys and girls playing against 19 year olds with not only at least a 50-75 pound weight differential, but also a 3-4 year age difference and even more experience difference. That’s a fairly common reality and we never question it, yet how is it so different for U14 that we have to react the way we have lately. The issue seems more agenda-driven and club-specific driven than common sense driven. It’s not to say there isn’t a concern or that measures don’t need to be put into place. It’s simply to say, “What are we doing and why?” Are we truly helping kids and rugby or serving another purpose?

Arguments (cont'd)

- My teams seem to have either several undersized players or several overweight players. We've had bad injuries occur to us and we've likely caused bad injuries. Yet, in 10 years, none of my undersized players have been severely hurt by overweight players (but have been by players of average size) and none of my overweight players have caused severe injuries (but my average weight players have). That goes against every convention of the opposing argument. Our tallest and most aggressive U14 player this year caused a couple bad injuries, yet he came in underweight. He's legit by the current system and wouldn't be questioned in the current or proposed systems. I don't think he should be either, but how does the armband concept and a tighter restriction on weight limit solve any issue in light of that? People generally agree that moving down an underweight but athletic and experienced older kid could put younger players at risk. How is it not the same concern to move up an inexperienced, unfit, overweight kid to play against fitter, faster, stronger players potentially 2-3 year older than them?
- Finally, a perspective on what the armband system did to average players. In our 3rd place final with Red Mtn, we forgot to put armbands on our two overweight starters before the match. I actually noticed this, got them from my bag and was waiting on the sideline for the next break in the game. Before we could get the bands out there, Red Mtn players complained to the ref after our first try that we didn't have armbands on and had too many overweight players on the field. We had four overweight players total. We had three subs for the match. Two subs were two of our four overweight players, so only two were on the field. The four were also our four least fit, slowest and worst tackling players. To put all four on the field would be a severe disadvantage to us. Red Mtn players incorrectly assumed our tall, star player who just scored was overweight. What they also didn't know was our more experienced overweight players were on the bench. When the ref stopped the match, we put the armbands on them and swapped out the original starters. We basically made our team better at that moment. Our star player also took it personally and proceeded to score a bunch of tries that put us up by a lot, early in the match. If I was the other coach, and knew what I knew at the time, I would've been furious that my players were focused on armbands instead of the game. It's that silly.

Rough Draft Concept of a Progression of Questions to Initiate, Qualify and Quantify Player Evaluations and Consider if They Should Move Up a Division

Overweight: Should the Player Move Up?

Questions	Response	Actions to Consider
Is the player over the recommended max weight for their normal age-grade division and requires a waiver to stay?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	If yes, they are on the radar to be evaluated. If they do not meet any other subsequent criteria, they are unlikely to be a threat and probably shouldn't move up.
Is the player in the older or 2nd year of their age-grade for that division?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	If yes, this adds value to the possibility of moving up. However, if not, or if they meet no other subsequent criteria, they may not be a candidate to move up.
Does the player have 2 or more full years of tackle rugby experience?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	If yes, this adds more value to the possibility of moving up. However, if they are in the 1st year of their age-grade and do not meet more criteria, they still may not be a candidate.
Is the player above-average in these key athletic attributes for their age-grade? Check each box to the right that applies:	Above-average <input type="checkbox"/> Speed <input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Agility	If yes to any, and 2 or more of the preceding criteria are met, they are likely a candidate to move up a division.

I think Rob Speers is correct that rugby acuity and skill should not be an evaluation factor. That is essentially God-given ability and doesn't factor into one player's potential threat to another player. However, I don't see why it can't be a proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. For instance, if all criteria are met to move a player up or down, but there is still resistance, I think their rugby IQ, or lack thereof, could be a final stamp that ends debate. However, I'd say all other factors should make it obvious anyway if it comes to that.

I also think if a club, coach or parent still resists the final decision after all criteria is vetted, they need to put in writing why the criteria doesn't justify allowing or preventing a division move. The burden of proof is on them at that point. The league has all rights to make a decision at that point. The way we do it now, leaves more questions than it answers and creates as much harm as it intends to avoid.