

## 2023 AGM Report – President

I am happy to provide a report on activities taken on by our team in 2023 and focus areas that we will be targeting as we continue through 2024.

As we look back at fiscal 2023, I wanted to highlight three key areas we focused on – capacity-building, governance activities, and continued execution on Rugby Alberta events:

### 1. Capacity-Building

- As a reminder, Rugby Alberta reduced our staff complement throughout the pandemic because of reduced activities and our focus on fiscal responsibility, but as we emerged from the pandemic in late 2022, it became clear that we needed to re-establish our team and expand our staffing in key areas
- A sub-committee of the Rugby Alberta Board of Directors completed an organizational review to determine the overall capacity of Rugby Alberta to execute on our commitments and strategic priorities
- The key result of the review was the firm belief that we needed an Executive Director role, focused on the overall operations of the organization but with enough capacity to be looking 3-5 years down the road to set ourselves up for success in the future. The addition of Sandy Nesbitt to the Rugby Alberta team in August executed on this vision.
- With Sandy's hire, it allowed us to transition Peter Houlihan into our Director of Rugby Operations role to focus on coordinating competitions, providing coach development activities, and overseeing our provincial Wolf Pack programs.
- We also identified that we needed a dedicated, knowledgeable resource focused on communications, and we were able to add a part-time Communications Coordinator in July to focus on our website, social media presence and general communications activities.
- Adding these key roles occurred later in 2023 than we had originally hoped but will provide our team with additional capacity to ensure we can execute on activities consistently throughout the year. This brings our staff complement to 5 permanent resources (3 full-time and 2 part-time), in addition to the contract positions we utilize throughout our busy summer period.

### 2. Governance Activities

- In the 2022 Rugby Alberta AGM, one of the key topics on our agenda was our approach to Safe Sport policies, risk management and an agreement we entered into with an Independent Third Party (ITP) organization to assist us with investigations into incidents of abuse or harassment of any kind.
- These areas continued to be a key focus in 2023 as we advanced a number of key initiatives from a governance perspective
- We developed and implemented a new Rugby Alberta Code of Conduct that can be accessed from the Rugby Alberta website. While not significantly different than the prior Code of Conduct, the new version articulates some key principles in the Safe Sport arena and brings us in line with a number of different Rugby Canada policies.

- We also continued to formalize our relationship with W&W Dispute Resolution Services, who is our ITP and also serves as Rugby Canada's ITP. Unfortunately, we did have multiple situations this year that were referred to our ITP for investigation that included inappropriate spectator behavior, harassment and inappropriate behavior at a social event.
- As most of us have likely seen from the news, this is not solely a rugby problem but is present in any major sport. Moving forward, we will continue to formalize processes related to Safe Sport and the reporting of these types of incidents to ensure we are completing our due diligence when we become aware of situations.

### 3. Events & Competitions

- Last, but definitely not least, I wanted to highlight the hard work of our small team and our partners across the province to execute on the key Rugby Alberta events we host throughout the year
- We had another successful ARC 7s tournament in the winter that we continued to receive positive feedback about but that also highlighted some challenges moving forward. The ARC tournament has historically been held the same weekend as the University 7s tournament in Edmonton, which provides our athletes with great exposure to what their future in rugby could look like, but also created some scheduling challenges for the 2023 event.
- Our ARC 15s tournament in July also continued to be a highlight of the year for the regional teams that participated so thank you to all of our partners in ensuring the event, hosted by St. Albert, was a success once again. This year, we invited provincial teams from Saskatchewan and Manitoba to participate in the event and the leaders of those unions were extremely grateful for that opportunity. While it expanded the scope of the tournament slightly, the goal was to provide our provincial partners with more meaningful competition and I believe we achieved that goal based on their feedback.
- We also hosted a very successful 'Westerns' tournament in August in Calgary that exceeded everyone's expectations. There was a great deal of interest in this tournament and, regardless of the name we gave it, quickly expanded to have an almost national presence with teams from BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Washington State participating. Thank you to all of our partners across the province that continued to make this tournament a success.
- And, we launched a new Rugby Alberta series that we plan to use as a model moving forward – the Wolfpack North vs Wolfpack South Senior Women's 2-game series was an opportunity to showcase some of the fantastic talent we have in our province. We were very excited to partner with Rugby Canada to host this series and have Kevin Rouet, the National Senior Women's team head coach, in attendance to watch some of our incredibly talented athletes. I was very proud to look at the Women's 15s and 7s teams participating in competitions this year and see that our province is very well-represented in both squads.

Looking forward to our 2024 plans, our goal will be to continue building on successes but also seeking to improve some areas of our sport where we have challenges:

- From an events perspective, we will continue to host both versions of our ARC tournaments but will be making some modifications as needed to ensure continued success. We will be piloting a two-weekend ARC 7s tournament, for example, to resolve some of the scheduling challenges we faced in 2023. These tournaments will still be held in conjunction with the University 7s tournaments in January but will see our women's and men's teams participating on different weekends.
- We want to build on the success of the Senior Women's Wolfpack series held in 2023 and expand that to include Senior Women's and Senior Men's competitions, along with a possible expansion to a 3-game series. Our goal will be to continue showcasing our talent to Rugby Canada staff and we will be working closely with our national partners to ensure coaching staff presence at those competitions. Lots of details still to work out but look for more information over the coming months as we finalize some of our plans.
- We want to ensure our domestic competitions (from AC/AWP all the way down through the various divisions) continue to provide meaningful competition throughout the province, no matter what skill level a player is at, and we will work with our sub-union and club partners over the course of the next 3-6 months to ensure we have healthy competitions.
- While Rugby Alberta continues to be in a very strong financial position overall, we are anticipating a small deficit budget for 2024 as we look to continue investing in our sport. The board is comfortable proceeding with a deficit budget for 2024 as we are excited about the opportunities ahead of us, but we know that extended deficit budgets are not sustainable. An additional focus in 2024 will be identifying new revenue streams, like an official sponsorship and/or donation program, and we will be working to establish key partnerships to help us in those areas.
- Lastly, we will be focusing on our relationship with Rugby Canada as they rollout a new strategic direction that is the culmination of a number of years of work. I expect we will see public announcements of the Rugby Canada strategy in the next few weeks but it will highlight the importance of Rugby Canada working with all of the provincial unions in a number of different areas. Aligned with this, Rugby Alberta will be kicking off activities to update our own 3-5 year Strategic Plan and we will engage various stakeholders for input and feedback throughout the year as we build out this document. Having a formalized strategy document in place will be critical in ensuring we are focusing our efforts in the areas our community feel are important.

I am very proud of the work the Rugby Alberta team and Board have completed this past year, and believe we can continue to build on our successes, but also find ways to continuously improve over the course of the next year as well.