

Message for the GPS Community from the nine GPS Headmasters and Principals

Saturday 19 January 2019

Dear GPS Community,

Re: Review of serious injuries sustained by schoolboy rugby union players

We are writing to update you on the review into the serious spinal injuries sustained last year by four schoolboy rugby players in the Great Public Schools' (GPS) Association of Queensland competition.

The GPS schools, Rugby Australia and the Queensland Rugby Union (QRU) resolved to undertake a thorough, independent review to assess whether there were any common themes with the injuries and, most importantly, any learnings to improve safety.

This weekend, Rugby Australia will publicly release the review's report, a copy of which can be found on its website at www.rugbyau.com

The GPS Association of Queensland welcomes the report's recommendations ahead of the 2019 season and will be working with Rugby Australia, the QRU and our schools to deliver leadership in player safety.

As an outcome of the review, Rugby Australia has developed a Best Practice Safe Rugby Framework ahead of the 2019 season, which incorporates its existing player safety guidelines and participation policy, as well as introducing new safety initiatives to be trialled this year.

Some of the most significant developments will be made in player assessment. New measures will be adopted to assess the physical development, motor competency and skill development of individual players to ensure they have the requisite skills, health and critical competencies to minimise the risk of potential injury.

The new player assessment procedures incorporate programs from tertiary institutions and research, Rugby Australia sports science experts, and best practice from other countries.

One such initiative will involve the launch of a 'Front Row Passport' program, which will be piloted predominantly in the 'A and B' Grade competitions within the 2019 GPS Rugby competition. The program is based on a successful model in France and works as an accreditation scheme for junior players to ensure they have the physical, skill and motor competencies to play in front row positions.

Other recommendations include: schools giving consideration to the way Rugby is offered, where appropriate, so best practice as recommended by Rugby Australia and the QRU is followed; each school reviewing insurance in relation to serious injury; and establishment of protocols to relieve administrative burdens on families in the event of future incidents.

We have already established a GPS Rugby Review Working Group to step out our response to the recommendations. The working group's goal is to ensure it supports our schools as quickly as possible to implement the Best Practice Safe Rugby Framework ahead of the 2019 season. The first meeting will be held on Friday 25 January 2019.

The working group includes representatives of all nine GPS member schools. The representatives are:

- Directors of Rugby – Mr. Steve Phillpotts (Brisbane Boys College), Mr. Dan Richie (Brisbane State High School), Mr. Jonathan Farrell (Toowoomba Grammar School)
- Directors of Sport and Activities – Mr. Bryan Hain (The Southport School), Mr. Nigel Greive (Ipswich Grammar School), Mr. Sean Tasker (Anglican Church Grammar School)

- Headmasters – Mr. Anthony Micallef (Brisbane Grammar School), Dr. Michael Carroll (St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace), Mr. Peter Fullagar (St Joseph's Nudgee College)

This group will work closely with Rugby Australia and the QRU and make recommendations to the GPS Management Committee for consideration at the first GPS Headmasters meeting in February 2019.

We would especially like to thank the families of James Kleidon, Ollie Bierhoff, Conor Tweedy and Alex Clark for their participation in the review process as they continue to deal with the impacts of their young men's injuries. We hope the report provides some comfort that their views and perspectives have been listened to and that they have made a valuable contribution to the ongoing improvement of player safety in our schools.

We continue, along with the Rugby Australia, the QRU and the GPS community, to offer any support we can to James, Ollie, Conor and Alex, their families and their schools, as the young men continue their rehabilitation.

As custodians of the GPS Rugby competition, we regard the safety and welfare of all boys who play the game as our highest priority. We applaud the review's thoroughness and the quality of the report and extend our thanks to the Review Panel led by James Bell QC and including Wallabies great Tim Horan, former Queensland Reds front rower Anthony Mathison, Rugby Australia Chief Medical Officer Warren McDonald, and GPS schools representative Brian Short.

We thank our communities for the overwhelming support for the families affected and trust the shared responsibility of focusing on the continuous improvement of safety for all GPS rugby players will continue to unite us.

We will continue to provide updates as we progress with the implementation of the Best Practice Safe Rugby Framework.

We also encourage input and support from members of the GPS community, and we invite you to contact us with any questions you may have about the report and our response.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Richard Morrison, Headmaster, Ipswich Grammar School
Mr. Anthony Micallef, Headmaster, Brisbane Grammar School
Dr. Michael Carroll, Principal, St Joseph's Gregory Terrace
Mr. Peter Hauser, Headmaster, Toowoomba Grammar School
Mr. Peter Fullagar, Principal, St Joseph's Nudgee College
Mr. Greg Wain, Headmaster, The Southport School
Mr. Paul Brown, Headmaster, Brisbane Boys' College
Dr. Alan Campbell, Headmaster, Anglican Church Grammar School
Mr. Wade Haynes, Executive Principal, Brisbane State High School