

= Rugby World Cup =

The Rugby World Cup is a men 's rugby union tournament contested every four years between the top international teams . The tournament was first held in 1987 , when the tournament was co @-@ hosted by New Zealand and Australia . New Zealand are the current champions , having defeated Australia in the final of the 2015 tournament in England .

The winners are awarded the William Webb Ellis Cup , named after William Webb Ellis , the Rugby School pupil who ? according to a popular legend ? invented rugby by picking up the ball during a football game . Four countries have won the trophy ; New Zealand have won it three times , two teams have won twice , Australia and South Africa , while England have won it once .

The tournament is administered by World Rugby , the sport 's international governing body . Sixteen teams were invited to participate in the inaugural tournament in 1987 , however since 1999 twenty teams have taken part . Japan will host the next event in 2019 .

= = Format = =

= = = Qualification = = =

Qualifying tournaments were introduced for the second tournament , where eight of the sixteen places were contested in a twenty @-@ four @-@ nation tournament . The inaugural World Cup in 1987 , did not involve any qualifying process ; instead , the 16 places were automatically filled by seven eligible International Rugby Football Board (IRFB , now World Rugby) member nations , and the rest by invitation .

In 2003 and 2007 , the qualifying format allowed for eight of the twenty available positions to be filled by automatic qualification , as the eight quarter finalists of the previous tournament enter its successor . The remaining twelve positions were filled by continental qualifying tournaments . Positions were filled by three teams from the Americas , one from Asia , one from Africa , three from Europe and two from Oceania . Another two places were allocated for repechage . The first repechage place was determined by a match between the runners @-@ up from the Africa and Europe qualifying tournaments , with that winner then playing the Americas runner @-@ up to determine the place . The second repechage position was determined between the runners @-@ up from the Asia and Oceania qualifiers .

The current format allows for 12 of the 20 available positions to be filled by automatic qualification , as the teams who finish third or better in the group (pool) stages of the previous tournament enter its successor (where they will be seeded) . The qualification system for the remaining eight places is region @-@ based , with a total eight teams allocated for Europe , five for Oceania , three for the Americas , two for Africa , and one for Asia . The last place is determined by an intercontinental play @-@ off .

= = = Tournament = = =

The 2015 tournament involved twenty nations competing over six weeks . There were two stages , a pool and a knockout . Nations were divided into four pools , A through to D , of five nations each . The teams were seeded before the start of the tournament , with the seedings taken from the World Rankings in December 2012 . The four highest @-@ ranked teams were drawn into pools A to D. The next four highest @-@ ranked teams were then drawn into pools A to D , followed by the next four . The remaining positions in each pool were filled by the qualifiers .

Nations play four pool games , playing their respective pool members once each . A bonus points system is used during pool play . If two or more teams are level on points , a system of criteria is used to determine the higher ranked ; the sixth and final criterion decides the higher rank through the official World Rankings .

The winner and runner @-@ up of each pool enter the knockout stage . The knockout stage

consists of quarter- and semi @-@ finals , and then the final . The winner of each pool is placed against a runner @-@ up of a different pool in a quarter @-@ final . The winner of each quarter @-@ final goes on to the semi @-@ finals , and the respective winners proceed to the final . Losers of the semi @-@ finals contest for third place , called the ' Bronze Final ' . If a match in the knockout stages ends in a draw , the winner is determined through extra time . If that fails , the match goes into sudden death and the next team to score any points is the winner . As a last resort , a kicking competition is used .

= = History = =

Prior to the Rugby World Cup , there was no truly global rugby union competition , but there were a number of other tournaments . One of the oldest is the annual Six Nations Championship , which started in 1883 as the Home Nations Championship , a tournament between England , Ireland , Scotland and Wales . It expanded to the Five Nations in 1910 , when France joined the tournament . France did not participate from 1931 to 1939 , during which period it reverted to a Home Nations championship . In 2000 , Italy joined the competition , which became the Six Nations .

Rugby union was also played at the Summer Olympic Games , first appearing at the 1900 Paris games and subsequently at London in 1908 , Antwerp in 1920 , and Paris again in 1924 . France won the first gold medal , then Australasia , with the last two being won by the United States . However rugby union ceased to be on Olympic program after 1924 .

The idea of a Rugby World Cup had been suggested on numerous occasions going back to the 1950s , but met with opposition from most unions in the IRFB . The idea resurfaced several times in the early 1980s , with the Australian Rugby Union (ARU) in 1983 , and the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU) in 1984 independently proposing the establishment of a world cup . A proposal was again put to the IRFB in 1985 and this time successfully passed 10 ? 6 . The delegates from Australia , France , New Zealand and South Africa all voted for the proposal , and the delegates from Ireland and Scotland against ; the English and Welsh delegates were split , with one from each country for and one against .

The inaugural tournament , jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand , was held in May and June 1987 , with sixteen nations taking part . New Zealand became the first ever champions , defeating France 29 ? 9 in the final . The subsequent 1991 tournament was hosted by England , with matches played throughout Britain , Ireland and France . This tournament saw the introduction of a qualifying tournament ; eight places were allocated to the quarter @-@ finalists from 1987 , and the remaining eight decided by a thirty @-@ five nation qualifying tournament . Australia won the second tournament , defeating England 12 ? 6 in the final .

In 1992 , eight years after their last official series , South Africa hosted New Zealand in a one @-@ off test match . The resumption of international rugby in South Africa came after the dismantling of the apartheid system , and was only done with permission of the African National Congress . With their return to test rugby , South Africa were selected to host the 1995 Rugby World Cup . After upsetting Australia in the opening match , South Africa continued to advance through the tournament until they met New Zealand in the final . After a tense final that went into extra time , South Africa emerged 15 ? 12 winners , with then President Nelson Mandela , wearing a Springbok jersey , presenting the trophy to South Africa 's captain , Francois Pienaar .

The tournament in 1999 was hosted by Wales with matches also being held throughout the rest of the United Kingdom , Ireland and France . The tournament included a repechage system , alongside specific regional qualifying places , and an increase from sixteen to twenty participating nations . Australia claimed their second title , defeating France in the final .

The 2003 event was hosted by Australia , although it was originally intended to be held jointly with New Zealand . England emerged as champions defeating Australia in extra time . England 's win was unique in that it broke the southern hemisphere 's dominance in the event . Such was the celebration of England 's victory , that an estimated 750 @,@ 000 people gathered in central London to greet the team , making the day the largest sporting celebration of its kind ever in the United Kingdom .

The 2007 competition was hosted by France , with matches also being held in Wales and Scotland . South Africa claimed their second title by defeating defending champions England 15 ? 6 . The 2011 tournament was awarded to New Zealand in November 2005 , ahead of bids from Japan and South Africa . The All Blacks reclaimed their place atop the rugby world with a narrow 8 ? 7 win over France in the 2011 final .

In the 2015 edition of tournament , hosted by England , New Zealand once again won the final , this time against established rivals , Australia . In doing so , they became the first team in World Cup history to win three titles , as well as the first to successfully defend a title . It was also New Zealand 's first title victory on foreign soil .

= = Trophy = =

The Webb Ellis Cup is the prize presented to winners of the Rugby World Cup , named after William Webb Ellis . The trophy is also referred to simply as the Rugby World Cup . The trophy was chosen in 1987 as an appropriate cup for use in the competition , and was created in 1906 by Garrard 's Crown Jewellers . The trophy is restored after each game by fellow Royal Warrant holder Thomas Lyte . The words ' The International Rugby Football Board ' and ' The Webb Ellis Cup ' are engraved on the face of the cup . It stands thirty @-@ eight centimetres high and is silver gilded in gold , and supported by two cast scroll handles , one with the head of a satyr , and the other a head of a nymph . In Australia the trophy is colloquially known as " Bill " ? a reference to William Webb Ellis .

= = Selection of hosts = =

Tournaments are organised by Rugby World Cup Ltd (RWCL) , which is itself owned by World Rugby . The selection of host is decided by a vote of World Rugby Council members . The voting procedure is managed by a team of independent auditors , and the voting kept secret . The allocation of a tournament to a host nation is now made five or six years prior to the commencement of the event , for example New Zealand were awarded the 2011 event in late 2005 .

The tournament has been hosted by multiple nations . For example , the 1987 tournament was co @-@ hosted by Australia and New Zealand . World Rugby requires that the hosts must have a venue with a capacity of at least 60 @,@ 000 spectators for the final . Host nations sometimes construct or upgrade stadia in preparation for the World Cup , such as Millennium Stadium ? purpose built for the 1999 tournament ? and Eden Park , upgraded for 2011 . The first country outside of the traditional rugby nations of SANZAR or the Six Nations to be awarded the hosting rights was Japan , who will host the 2019 tournament .

= = Tournament growth = =

= = = Media coverage = = =

Organizers of the 2015 tournament in England claim that the Rugby World Cup is the third largest sporting event in the World , behind only the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics . Although significant evidence suggests that is untrue .

Reports emanating from World Rugby and its business partners have frequently touted the tournament 's media growth , with cumulative worldwide television audiences of 300 million for the inaugural 1987 tournament , 1 @.@ 75 billion in 1991 , 2 @.@ 67 billion in 1995 , 3 billion in 1999 , 3 @.@ 5 billion in 2003 , and 4 billion in 2007 .

The 4 billion figure was widely dismissed as the global audience for television is estimated to be about 4 @.@ 2 billion .

However , independent reviews have called into question the methodology of those growth estimates , pointing to factual inconsistencies . The event 's supposed drawing power outside of a handful of rugby strongholds was also downplayed significantly , with an estimated 97 percent of the

33 million average audience produced by the 2007 final coming from Australasia , South Africa , the British Isles and France . Other sports have been accused of exaggerating their television reach over the years ; such claims are not exclusive to the Rugby World Cup .

While the event 's global popularity remains a matter of dispute , high interest in traditional rugby nations is well documented . The 2003 final , between Australia and England , became the most watched rugby union match in the history of Australian television .

= = = Attendance = = =

= = = Revenue = = =

Notes :

The host union keeps revenue from gate receipts . World Rugby , through RWCL , receive revenue from sources including broadcasting rights , sponsorship and tournament fees .

= = Results = =

= = = Tournaments = = =

= = = Performance of nations = = =

Twenty @-@ five nations have participated at the Rugby World Cup (excluding qualifying tournaments) . Of the eight tournaments that have been held , all but one have been won by a national team from the southern hemisphere . The southern hemisphere 's dominance has been broken only in 2003 , when England beat Australia in the final .

Thus far the only nations to host and win a tournament are New Zealand (1987 and 2011) and South Africa (1995) . The performance of other host nations includes England (1991 final hosts) and Australia (2003 hosts) finishing runners @-@ up . France (2007 hosts) finished fourth , while Wales (1999 hosts) failed to reach the semi @-@ finals . Wales became the first host nation to be eliminated at the pool stages in 1991 , while , England became the first solo host nation to be eliminated at the pool stages in 2015 . Of the twenty @-@ five nations that have ever participated in at least one tournament , twelve of them have never missed a tournament .

= = = Team records = = =

= = Records and statistics = =

The record for most points overall is held by English player Jonny Wilkinson , who scored 277 over his World Cup career . Grant Fox of New Zealand holds the record for most points in one competition , with 126 in 1987 ; Jason Leonard of England holds the record for most World Cup matches : 22 between 1991 and 2003 . Simon Culhane holds the record for most points in a match by one player , 45 , as well as the record for most conversions in a match , 20 . Marc Ellis holds the record for most tries in a match , six , which he scored against Japan in 1995 .

All Black Jonah Lomu is the youngest player to appear in a final ? aged 20 years and 43 days at the 1995 Final , . Lomu shares 2 records with South African Bryan Habana . Most tries in a tournament (8) : Lomu in 1999 and Habana in 2007 and total world cup tournament tries , both scored 15 . The record for most penalties in a match is 8 , held by Matt Burke , Gonzalo Quesada , Gavin Hastings and Thierry Lacroix , and the record for most penalties in a tournament , 31 , is held by Gonzalo Quesada . South Africa 's Jannie de Beer kicked five drop @-@ goals against England in 1999 ? an

individual record for a single World Cup match .

The most points scored in a game is 145 ? by the All Blacks against Japan in 1995 , while the widest winning margin is 142 , held by Australia in a match against Namibia in 2003 .

A total of 16 players have been sent off (red carded) in the tournament . Welsh lock Huw Richards was the first , while playing against New Zealand in 1987 . No player has been red carded more than once .

= = = Printed sources = = =

Collins , Tony (2008) . " ' The First Principle of Our Game ' : The rise and fall of amateurism : 1886 ? 1995 " . In Ryan , Greg . The Changing Face of Rugby : The Union Game and Professionalism since 1995 . Cambridge Scholars Publishing . ISBN 1 @-@ 84718 @-@ 530 @-@ 4 .

Davies , Gerald (2004) . The History of the Rugby World Cup Sanctuary Publishing Ltd . ISBN 1 @-@ 86074 @-@ 602 @-@ 0 .

Farr @-@ Jones , Nick , (2003) . Story of the Rugby World Cup , Australian Post Corporation . ISBN 0 @-@ 642 @-@ 36811 @-@ 2 .

Harding , Grant ; Williams , David (2000) . The Toughest of Them All : New Zealand and South Africa : The Struggle for Rugby Supremacy . Auckland , New Zealand : Penguin Books . ISBN 0 @-@ 14 @-@ 029577 @-@ 1 .

Martin , Gerard John (2005) . The Game is not the Same ? a History of Professional Rugby in New Zealand (Thesis) . Auckland University of Technology .

Peatey , Lance (2011) . In Pursuit of Bill : A Complete History of the Rugby World Cup . New Holland Publishers . ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 74257 @-@ 191 @-@ 1 .

Phillpots , Kyle (2000) . The Professionalisation of Rugby Union (Thesis) . University of Warwick .

Williams , Peter (2002) . " Battle Lines on Three Fronts : The RFU and the Lost War Against Professionalism " . The International Journal of the History of Sport (Routledge) 19 (4) : 114 ? 136 @.@ doi : 10 @.@ 1080 / 714001793 .