



## SUOMEN RUGBYLIITTO ANNUAL REPORT 2012

Rugby has continued to develop at strength in Finland this year. At years end, for the first time in its history, the SRL has the three officer positions being filled by non-board members. With the positions of General Secretary, Treasurer and National Technical Director finally filled simultaneously (albeit with unpaid volunteer staff); workload can be distributed depending on administrative, financial or sporting needs, as per the FIRA-AER union model.

At the end of 2012, 604 people were registered to play rugby in Finland through 14 clubs. As this was the first year licensing was established, we were able to separate out the youth members that were playing in domestic competitions from those that were participating only in the schools programme.

	2012	2011	2010
# Clubs	14	11	11
Male Adult	422	353	270
Female Adult	157	119	90
Youth (under 18 years)	25	?	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>604</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>390</b>

The national team was fortunate to see an expected relegation not materialising, but the schedule for the European Nations Cup 2D and Rugby World Cup 2015 qualifiers were set for the 2012-2014 season, allowing the union to work with local councils to ensure availability of pitches outside of the normal grass "window".

Introducing rugby at schools continues to be a priority and Miika Valo in Tampere has demonstrated that persistence, passion and perseverance can establish a foothold. In 2013, the SRL must capitalise on this to grow the programme and ensure the availability of club resources to allow for a sustainable junior competition in the near future.

The newer clubs have proven they "have game", in the 2012 season as well as being active in the national discussions. It is fresh input from these clubs that drive a continuous desire to improve competition, development, education and administration at all levels of rugby in Finland.

Coca-Cola Amatil & Aussie Bar International have signed contracts to support the men's National Team, and Eerikkilä Sports Institute has continued its support for all SRL teams for a further two years.



Without the support of these sponsors as well as the ongoing support of our equipment and kit supplier, Samurai Rugby Gear, the SRL's work would be significantly harder.

On the completion of the London Summer Olympics, Rugby 7s entered the Olympic programme for the 2016 & 2020 games. Lauri Ylönen has been at the forefront of establishing a more professional organisation for the women's 7s national team squad which will see paid positions being established over the next 2-3 years in order to provide appropriate support for elite women rugby players. Due to the elections of the Finnish National Olympic Committee in the latter part of 2012, this has not progressed as quickly as we would have liked, but has not been forgotten and continues into 2013.

After two years in charge of the finances, Ville Siiskonen will step down in February 2013. He has been a fantastic team member within the SRL Staff. His successor will be Ms Salla Salo and the transition between the two started in December. Ville will not be stepping down completely from all SRL duties as he will head up the SRL's Anti Doping efforts. This will see more communication between the IRB, the Finnish Anti Doping Committee and the introduction of Anti Doping training starting with the National Teams in 2013.

## **1. Administration**

The SRL board has held two meetings since the 2011 AGM. Both of these have been held via teleconferencing or Skype and are in conjunction with decisions made on the secure SRL board forum at [www.rugbyfinland.com](http://www.rugbyfinland.com). Appointments are:

### **Board**

<b>Chairman</b>	Palemia Field
<b>Vice Chairman</b>	Stephen Whittaker (resigned July 2012)
<b>Members</b>	George Mossford, Jouni Raninen, Merita Valkeapää, Patrick Vikström
<b>Deputy members</b>	Mikko Korte & Katri Nummelin

### **Officers**

<b>General Secretary</b>	Stevan Thorne
<b>Treasurer</b>	Ville Siiskonen
<b>Technical Director</b>	Stephen Whittaker (from July 2012)
<b>Competition Coordinator</b>	George Mossford
<b>Womens' Rugby</b>	Sonja Kivelä
<b>Webmaster</b>	John Maxwell

### **IRB Accredited Educators:**

<b>Match Officials</b>	Olli Linnossuo & George Mossford
<b>Coaching</b>	Stuart Reynish & Roni Riekki
<b>Strength &amp; Conditioning</b>	Roni Riekki

As in 2011, the Finland Rugby Referees' Association continued to appoint the referees to competitive matches during the domestic season, as well as where FIRA appointments were required, this also included the Men's National Team having an Assistant Match Official (AMO) travel with them on a few occasions.

## **2. Finances**

The SRL balance sheet and other official financial figures can be found in the audit report 2012 (Finnish Rugby Federation financial statement 1.1.2012-31.12.2012). The 2011 accounts were accepted and closed by the member clubs at the AGM in 3 March 2012 in Jyväskylä. The 2013 Budget was presented and accepted at the EGM held on 30 September in Helsinki.

SRL were granted 17753.04€ by IRB for year 2012. For year 2013 the grant is 19617.36€. This is inline with the grant of previous years as well as a 1226.09€ increase which is for the procurement of a 'full time' Technical Director. SRL received a grant total of 12 000€ in four instalments over the year 2012 from Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö (Ministry of Education and Culture, OKM), which will be the same in 2013.

## **3. Sponsorship**

Samurai Sportswear become the Official Kit Supplier to the SRL as of 1 August 2010. This partnership continued through 2011 and 2012.

Eerikkilä Urheilupuisto and the SRL signed a supplier contract to provide travel expenses and a wage to coaching staff, on a sliding scale based on participants, for all training camps held in 2012. This has been extended for 2013-2014

Powerade, under the operating arm of Coca Cola signed a year agreement with the Men's National Team to be the official supplier of drinks to the team, in return Powerade receive logo placement and warm up tshirts adorning the Powerade logo. This agreement looks set to continue into the future.

The Men's National Team also signed a shirt logo sponsorship deal. Aussie Bar International will have their logo across the chest of the men's NT shirt; this is for a 2 year deal. Aussie Bar are already sponsors of Warriors and Eagles.

## **4. Junior Development**

2012 was a very busy rugby year with plenty happening in the youth rugby scene.

National youth training days, which were initiated during autumn 2011, continued during the spring and summer 2012, reaching a total of 7 events. The idea sprung from lack of numbers at club level and a desire of young prospective players to get together to train and compete. The events drew around 20-35 players each, thus enabling to coach team-level skills too. Most of the training was focused on basic and

unit level skills, however, as these still need a plenty of attention with the young lot.

Players aged 17-19 participated and gained a lot of excellent match experience at the Midnight Rugby event held in June at Myllypuro, Helsinki. Youth matches were organized, as well as many players getting into the midst of action in the senior teams.

The Federation hosted in August a FIRA-AER U17 camp at Eerikkilä, where 23 players from Finland and Estonia received top level coaching as well got the opportunity to test each other's resolve and courage. The Estonian players arrived at the camp confident and clearly more experienced; however, our local lads (and one brave lassie!) won the final tournament on aggregated score of 4-3 – well done! The camp provided much needed match experience and vitally, a big morale boost for the players.

Autumn 2012 saw the IRB school tag rugby program swing into action at earnest. Over 2,200 school children have gotten an introduction to rugby in Pori, Kuopio, Helsinki, Porvoo and Tampere. Jyväskylä RC initiated also a city sports education program, which enabled anyone to try out the sport for free. This will promote the sport and help to raise much needed awareness.

The IRB tag program was completed with an indoor school tag-tournament, held in December at Pirkkahalli, Tampere. A total of 23 school teams participated (over 250 players, grades 6- 12) from Tampere and Pori and the event was considered by all as very successful.

Many schools that participated in the program, which comprises school coaching visits and PE-teacher training events, received also a SRL tag-kit (balls, tag belts). The program is set to continue in 2013 and the benefits should become visible in the not-so-distant future. Rugby is generally not a sport that the local youth consider, but namely so due to lack of any awareness of rugby. A lot of work in the right direction has been initiated during the past 18 months by many enthusiastic SRL club members and much hard, but undoubtedly rewarding work is still needed.

## **5. Domestic Competitions**

There were four SRL-sanctioned competitions in 2012: the Championship (men), Women's Championship, Division 1 (men), and SRL 7s (men). Division 1 was split into three regional pools (North, East, and West) with combined semi-finals and final. There were no Women's 7s or junior competitions. In total, 23 teams competed across 14 clubs.

This year's Finnish Championship was the most competitive to date, ending with Helsinki Warriors narrowly defeating Turku Eagles 11 - 7 in the final in Jyväskylä (Eagles having overcome Tampere in the sole semi-final). This was Warriors' fifth successive Championship victory.

The Women's Championship final was contested between the top two seeds from the regular season: Helsinki Warriors and Jyväskylä. After a hard-fought encounter it was the regular season winners, Warriors that came away with the victory.

The regular season of Division 1 split between three regional pools with a greatly improved standard of rugby throughout. The Northern division utilised a traditional home-and-away format whereas both the East and West divisions retained the tournament-based format. All three pool winners (Jyväskylä in the North, Rauma Ice Pack in the West, and Helsinki in the East) advanced to the semi-finals along with the "lucky loser", OYUS (Oulu). RIP and OYUS came through the semis to play a magnificent game in which the lead changed hands several times before OYUS won the game 19 - 17 in the dying stages.

There was no Women's 7s series in 2012, but the men's SRL 7s was held. This was originally designed to be played over two legs but due to lack of participation only the first was held in Tampere at the start of the season. Tampere emerged the victor from this tournament to claim the 7s crown.

All in all, the season was very well contested. Most matches were close in all divisions and many new teams stepped up a level. The sense is that domestic Finnish rugby is improving year by year.

## **6. National Teams**

From 2010, all Senior Men and Women are required to sign compliance with the National Team's Code of Conduct.

### **Senior Men**

The 2010-2012 ENC season (2010-2012) continued with Finland being grouped into ENC Division 2D. Finland faced 5 opponents in 2012.

Luxembourg away was a win that was looking to put us on track to avoiding finishing last, looking to make amends for the loss to Greece in the last game of 2011 it just wasn't going to be. Each time that Finland is looking to escape the bottom of the pit it would seem Luxembourg is trying to do the same. On this occasion they wanted it more and took the game 26-3.

All eyes now needed to look to taking Bulgaria and eeking something out against Cyprus- Bulgaria at home, with the game being held in Turku for the first time. The game was preceded by a Development League Tournament. The conditions for the game were hot and Bulgaria were not looking to have a repeat of the last game in which they won by 2 points from a last minute try. They had also been taken apart by Cyprus in Bulgaria not long before facing Finland. Finland weren't executing the game plan as it should have been but the game was a tight one. Finland also failed

to capitalize when Bulgaria had one player red carded and another yellow carded. The final score was 24-26 again a loss by 2. Many will say, as will the players, that was a game that was there for the taking. Either which, it wasn't going to happen. Two losses by two points against a team in one year that has yet to be beaten by Finland is proving the progression the team is facing.

Next up was Cyprus in Helsinki, with a 15's game from the Women's National Team against 1<sup>st</sup> time visitors Switzerland. Finland's previous and only encounter against Cyprus was in Cyprus the year before, and was a 70-10 loss. Cyprus were riding high after demolishing Bulgaria 3-97 in Bulgaria and extending their unbeaten run. Finland showed them that underdogs don't lie down and don't stay down, bringing the game to them and opening the score sheet first. However, Cyprus proved why they have an unbeaten run and that superior fitness plays a huge part. The final score was 10-52. This resulted in Finland finishing bottom in the group and facing certain relegation to the bottom division in European rugby.

Due to various reshuffles in groups above and 1 team withdrawing Finland were offered an olive branch once again. They would remain in 2D. And should count themselves very fortunate. The new group would consist of Greece, Luxembourg, Norway (dropping from 2C) and Bosnia (rising from 3). Games were set and the first opponent would be Luxemburg at home. As with Finland and their usual regime, it took them a good 20 minutes to get into the game. Luxemburg caught an early break with an intercepted pass that should never been given. This was the only time Luxemburg looked like threatening the goal line of Finland. The last 20 minutes saw an influx of fresh legs and spirit enter the pitch and it was then that Finland showed what they can do. Backs were stringing moves together and playing with a confidence. Unfortunately the clock ran out and the team lost by 2 (again). Final score 14-16

Next up was Norway away. Norway were an unknown entity, they'd been relegated from a division above so clearly weren't good enough to play there but had been there for quite a while. Once again we wanted to capitalize on the success of the previous game and make it last for 80 minutes. Conditions both weather wise and pitch wise were terrible. Norway came out of the starting blocks at pace and physical. Quite possibly at a level we've not played since Lithuania over 5 years ago. Finland gave a good account of themselves, but tired legs set in way too early, and the Norwegians got us playing their game rather than us playing our game. The game was a loss with a score of 32-3

For 2013 things need to happen in the Men's rugby. Finishing last in the group again will surely not bring another 'get out of jail free' card. And playing 3C will not be what Finnish Rugby want. Alan Hine has continued to be the Head Coach for the Senior Men with Alastair Davies appointed as Assistant Coach. Stephen Whittaker continuing as the Team Manager.

## **Women XV**

The women's National Team started in the winter 2008. The head coach for the Women's XV squad is Tytti Yli-Viikari. Team Manager duties are handled by Laura Laakso.

A new 15s team was selected for the season 2012. The aim was to integrate new motivated and "developing" players to the National Team – that is to say players, who had not before played at international level, but whose skills and potential to develop were noticed by their club coaches. Based on club coaches' recommendations, ten newbies took part in the 24-player squad which competed in Enköping, Sweden for the FIRA-AER Women's 15's European Trophy B on 2-7th May 2012. The tournament player participation fee (570 e) was the most important factor for new players not taking part in the selection process – out of the 60 players recommended by their club coaches, 22 replied they could not take part because of the money.

The NT trained at Vantaa on the 31 March and 14th April. A training camp was organized at the Eerikkilä Sports Centre 28-29th April and the tournament took place in Sweden 2-5th May 2012. A players' feedback session was held in Turku on the 26th of May before the men's NT game.

The team developed well during the European Trophy B –tournament and every player improved her skills and game sense. The score of the Netherlands-Finland game was 105-0 and the Finland-Russia game 17-45.

FIRA-AER cancelled in July 2012 the women's 15s European Trophy tournament that was to take place in spring 2013. Thus we have planned to have friendly games to keep up the good development and to motivate the integration of new players to the team during the coming season.

On the 6th of October there was a friendly game against Switzerland in Helsinki. On Friday 5.10. there were preparatory trainings in Vantaa. The game ended in Switzerland's victory, but all our players got a good opportunity to play and show their talent in front of own supporters.

A pre-season 2013 national team camp was held in Eerikkilä Sports' Center on 10-11th November. Club coaches recommended developing and motivated players who were then invited to the Eerikkilä camp along with all 2012 NT players. As wished for in the May 2012 players' feed-back session, players were selected to be part of a group of about 30 players willing to commit for XV NT activities for the year 2013.

### 2012 women's 15s national team activities:

31.3. full-day training session in Tikkurila, Vantaa

14.4. full-day training session in Tikkurila, Vantaa

28-29.4. training camp in Eerikkilä

2.5.-7.5. European Trophy Women's 15's B

- 26.5. feed-back session in Turku
- 5.10. pre-game training session in Vantaa
- 6.10. friendly game against Switzerland, in Helsinki
- 10-11.11. 15's NT training camp in Eerikkilä

#### 2012 women's 15s national team officers:

Coach: Tytti Yli-Viikari  
Team Manager: Laura Laakso  
Assistant Coach: Kati Miettinen (spring 2012)  
Physio: Jani Parkkinen

### **Women 7's**

Women's rugby sevens is growing rapidly in Europe both in numbers and the level of the game. National teams main event for 2012 was the European Sevens Championship which was held 9.-10.6. in Ghent, Belgium. Top2 of the tournament did qualify for the 2nd round of World Cup qualification tournaments. 2013 sevens World Cup also attracted "new" sevens countries like Ireland and Scotland. As a preparation for the tournament the team had 3 weekend camps in Finland and also attended Amsterdam sevens in May. The first day of Amsterdam pinpointed a major problem in Finnish rugby: we do not play enough 7s and wintertime is too long without proper competition. As a result the team did not qualify for the second day but managed to arrange friendly matches against Denmark and Austria. The result for the second day was better with a victory in both matches.

The final team for the European championship was finalised after Amsterdam. Although the form was better in Ghent than in Amsterdam, the team failed to achieve it's goals. In the pool stage Finland lost to Scotland and Georgia, but won both Norway and Malta. In the plate semifinal Finland lost to Poland and in the final match Finland had a bitter loss against Norway. The final position of the tournament was 8th.

In May the head coach Lauri Ylönen attended IRB accelerated high performance program in London. After the disappointing European Championship tournament and thorough discussions with players, a plan was set up in order to raise the level of the game both domestically and in the national team. The high performance plan is a set structure for womens sevens towards 2016 and on (2020). It includes training groups for the national team, a plan for the structures of daily training and a plan to set up domestic winter sevens series, which takes place in January-April 2013.

In the training camps in Autumn 2012 we set the platform on which we are building the national team on. In the 1st stage the intense training group players are committed for 2014 and they are training together every week. Other players are joining them once a month in Eerikkilä sports institute for a weekend session.



2012 women's 7s national team activities:

21.-22.4. camp in Eerikkilä

12.-13.5. camp in Eerikkilä and Vantaa

19.-20.5. Amsterdam 7s

2.-3.6. camp in Laukaa

9.-10.6. European Women's Sevens Championship, Ghent, Belgium

13.-14.10. camp in Eerikkilä

8.-9.12. camp in Eerikkilä

2012 women's 7s national team officers:

Coach: Lauri Ylönen

Team Manager: Sanni Virtanen (until August 2012)

Physio: Jani Parkkinen

## **7. Match Officials**

With two exceptions, all matches were officiated by appointed FRRRA referees showing a marked increase in the ability of Finnish rugby to appoint sufficient numbers of officials to games and tournaments country-wide.

Two iRB L1 MO courses were held in 2012 attended by a total of 26 potential officials. The first was held in conjunction with Snow Rugby in Jyväskylä in March and resulted in 6 new FRRRA members that each refereed at least one appointed game during the regular season. A second course was held in Vaasa in December aimed at referee recruitment from the Northern clubs.

FIRA also invited the SRL to send a representative to train as a FIRA-AER Match Commissioner. After the SRL sent out a request to all clubs, three clubs forwarded nominees and these were sent to FIRA-AER for selection. Stevan Thorne was chosen and successfully completed the course in November 2012.

## **8. IRB/ FIRA-AER**

The SRL has worked closely with FIRA-AER in 2012 and the General Secretary attended two conferences/workshops to improve General Secretaries' knowledge and also to help improve the communication between the Unions and FIRA-AER. Full information of the conference contents are available in separate documents.

Most importantly, a letter of agreement between Finland Rugby and FIRA/IRB was signed with regards to the development of the game. Finland's targets are to increase the player base over the next 5 years with concentrations on Youth rugby and the Military. The targets are set deliberately high, but with everyone within Finnish rugby working together they are achievable. Clubs especially need to note that there will be an upcoming "player drain" as senior players start to look at retirement from the game.

The IRB's Training and Education Support scheme resulted in a visit from Leinster coach and ex-Springbok Dan Van Zwyf visiting Helsinki to conduct a training course for coaches. Attendance was very poor with only one club sending representatives. This may be due to a number of reasons (location, communication) which will need to be rectified in order to have a successful 2013 course (which is most likely specific training for youth coaching, something lacking in Finland rugby at the current time).

As part of the IRB's push to have all registered players around the world gain a better understanding of the game both on and off the field they created the "Rugby Ready" programme. It was agreed upon in the SRL Autumn meeting that for the season 2013 all registered players in Finland will need to have completed the online IRB Rugby Ready self assessment.

Players will sign a letter of declaration that they have completed this and the club secretaries will keep this information on file in case the SRL or IRB request to see this. Players will not be allowed to obtain a licence until this assessment has been completed.

2012 also saw Finland hosting a U17 camp in Eerrikilä with Estonia . Latvia's late withdrawal resulted in only 23 attendees. It was announced in the General Assembly in Paris that Finland will not be given funding for 2013 U17 camp as we cannot provide the necessary criteria to qualify for the funding (25 players, 5 coaching trainees and 5 match official trainees). Both FIRA-AER and the IRB were unhappy with the attendance numbers from both countries and Finland will not be invited to attend or host a similar event in 2013.

## **9. The Finnish Sports Federation, SLU**

Sports Governance in Finland underwent significant change in 2012 with several organisations now being merged into one entity on January 1 2013, called Valo. How this will affect day to day operations is not yet known, however, we have not seen a change in the way of working just yet. That being said, it is imperative that rugby continues its increase in both playing numbers and clubs to ensure that it can become a full member of the National Sports Association before Rio 2016.

## **10. National Olympic Committee**

The NOC underwent serious soul searching after the poor showing of the Finnish Olympic team in London. A new chairman and committee were voted in, and after receiving previous instructions to wait until after London, Rugby has not been able to cement a model of cooperation with the Finnish NOC regarding women's sevens. It is the intention that this is pushed ahead during the first half of 2013, particularly as the new Finnish Sports Association's role should be clearer.

The SRL is a full member of the Finnish Olympic Committee. Ville Siiskonen is the SRL's Member on the NOC, whilst Olli Linnossuo is his deputy.

Palemia Field  
Chairman

Stevan Thorne  
General Secretary