

Rugby Sevens

Sevens is the fast-paced, shortened form of the game of rugby played by seven-a-side teams.

Olympic history will be made at Rio in 2016, when rugby sevens will make its debut appearance at an Olympic Games. The fast, free-flowing nature of the game, passionate spectators and festival atmosphere that are associated with a sevens tournament, along with its growing global broadcast audience and social media following, will make it an exciting addition to the Olympic schedule.

Qualifying – the road to Rio

The New Zealand Women's Sevens team qualified for the Rio Games by reaching the top four during the 2014/15 Women's Sevens Series.

Meanwhile, the third place in the 2014-15 Sevens World Series for the All Blacks Sevens team earned them a qualification for Rio. The top four teams qualified – Fiji, South Africa, New Zealand and England.

Argentina, the USA and France have since qualified as South American, North American and European men's qualifiers, respectively, and Japan has also qualified by winning the ARFU Men's Sevens Championships in Hong Kong in November.

As host nation, Brazil's men's and women's teams automatically qualify for the events. The final spots will be determined by repechage tournaments to be held in Europe in June 2016.

The full squad of New Zealand men's and women's sevens players for 2016 will be confirmed later this year, with the final teams of 12 players for Rio announced in July 2016.



Competition at Rio

Twelve men's teams and twelve women's teams will compete at Rio. Both the men's and women's competitions will be held at the Deodoro Stadium:

- Women's competition: 6-8 August
- Men's competition: 9-11 August.

The semi-finals and final will take place on the last day of the respective competitions.

Games consist of two halves of 7 minutes, with a 1 minute half-time break. The final will be played over two halves of 10 minutes each, with a half-time break of 2 minutes.

"It's the biggest sporting stage in the world so to get the opportunity to try and go to the Olympic Games is huge. It won't be easy, there'll be a lot of players going for it and it'll mean a lot of hard work, but to be part of it will be something very special."

Tim Mikkelson, All Blacks Sevens

"The Olympic Games is the pinnacle of any sporting career and in rugby to combine that with the Olympic Games will be massive for our country. The Olympic Games has really changed the sevens game – it's created a lot more competition which is exciting, but it also makes it harder for teams to win. We'll be working hard to not just perform well, but hopefully to win gold. There'll be so much pressure and it will really come down to critical moments – whoever makes the most of opportunities will come out on top. It's going to be huge, I can't wait and I will be doing all I can to earn a spot on the New Zealand team."

Sarah Goss, New Zealand Women's Sevens captain

The Stars of Rugby Sevens

The New Zealand men's and women's teams are the current World Champions of Sevens and have dominated their respective competitions. However, Rugby Sevens has become extremely competitive in recent years as it grows in popularity and as its inclusion in the Olympic Games encourages more countries to invest in the game. New Zealand's men's team guided by master coach, Sir Gordon Tietjens, has won 12 of the 16 World Series titles to date.

In the 2014/15 season, New Zealand finished third in a tight tussle, which eventually saw Fiji edge South Africa to win its second series title. South Africa and Samoa boast one title each. However, the stunning triumph of the USA in winning the London Sevens in May 2015 underlines how competitive the men's game is becoming.

The New Zealand Women's Sevens team has won all three Sevens Series since its inception in 2012. This season they clinched the title after winning four of the six tournaments in convincing fashion. Under the guidance of coach, Sean Horan, they have had the edge on competitors, but the gap is fast closing. Australia has been a fierce rival and Canada's victory in the last tournament in Amsterdam in May 2015 shows New Zealand will have to work hard to maintain its dominance.

Did you know?

- Conversions in a sevens match must be taken within 40 seconds of a try being scored, while in the 15-a-side game it's 60 seconds – and kickers are only allowed to drop kick the conversion to ensure that the game never slows down.
- In a Sevens match the coach has five substitutions available, but is only allowed to use three of these during the course of the game. In 15-a-side rugby, they have seven substitutes and can use all seven in the course of the game.
- Sevens pulls in the big shots – famous international rugby heroes who have represented their country in sevens include: Springboks Jean De Villiers and Gio Aplon, All Blacks Jonah Lomu and Christian Cullen; Aussies George Gregan and Joe Roff; the English players Lawrence Dallaglio and Matt Dawson; and Argentina's Augustin Pichot.
- The Hong Kong Sevens is the most well-known on the Sevens Series circuit and was the first rugby tournament to attract a major sponsorship.
- Fifteen-a-side rugby was played at the Olympic Games, over four games from 1900-1924, but has not been included since. The USA is the current Olympic champion, having won gold in 1924 in Paris.
- The New Zealand women's team has dominated women's sevens on the world stage since 2009.
- The Sevens World Series, which consisted of nine tournaments in eight countries and with teams competing for the series title by accumulating points based on their finishing position in each tournament, has been expanded to 10 tournaments for the 2015-2016 season.

Timeline

- 1883** Rugby sevens has its origins in Melrose, Scotland, with the first international tournament played there in 1883. For the next 100 years it was played only at a local level in Scotland and England.
- 1973** First international rugby sevens tournament was held at Murrayfield, Scotland, as part of the Scottish rugby centenary celebrations.
- 1973** All Blacks Sevens Men's team was first selected. They attended their first major tournament in 1983; the Hong Kong Sevens.
- 1976** The Hong Kong Sevens was launched.
- 1993** Rugby Sevens World Cups, were introduced and held every 4 years, the last being Moscow in 2013, where both New Zealand men's and women's teams triumphed.
- 1999-2000** The World Sevens Series was established by the International Rugby Board (now World Rugby) to develop an elite-level competition series between rugby nations.
- 2000** The New Zealand Women's Sevens team was first selected for the Hong Kong Sevens. An official team also played at the 2001 event, but no more teams were selected until 2009 for the Rugby World Cup Sevens.