



## **Rugby for the People: Brighton 7s Festival’s Manifesto for Equality, Accountability, and Wellbeing in Rugby Union**

**To our friends, lovers, and comrades in the game of rugby,**

**Rugby—a sport born out of communities, a game built on teamwork, courage, and respect—has been hijacked.** It has been stolen by a small elite, who care more for their bank balances and corporate backers than for the players who put their bodies on the line, the fans who fill the stands, and the young people who deserve a fair chance to play.

Rugby union in England stands at a crossroads, not just for rugby, but for the values that bind us as a society.

Let us speak plainly. England Rugby (the RFU), a once-proud institution, has been turned into a boardroom of corporate managers. It hands out generous bonuses to executives whilst grassroots clubs struggle to keep their doors open. It allows profiteers to dominate the game while those who built it—players, referees, coaches, and fans—are denied a voice. It has allowed unchecked greed to triumph over fairness, and exploitation to triumph over welfare.

But we say this cannot, and will not, continue.

**Brighton 7s Festival is here to reclaim the soul of rugby.** We are here to declare that this great game, played in our towns, schools, and villages, belongs to the people—not the profiteers. We are here to say that player health and safety are not inconveniences to be ignored but sacred responsibilities that must come before profit. And we are here to say that no person, no fan, no club should be priced out of the game they love.

**This manifesto is not just a programme for change—it is a declaration of intent. It is an assertion that rugby must once again be a force for good.** That rugby union must empower communities, inspire generations, and bring people together, regardless of background or wealth.

Brighton 7s Festival is committed to challenging those who sit in their boardrooms, insulated from the consequences of their decisions. We will stand with the players who suffer in silence, and we will support the families who have been left to pick up the pieces. And we will fight for the grassroots—the true beating heart of rugby.

**This is not just about rugby—it is about democracy, fairness, and justice. It is about who owns the game, who benefits from it, and whose voices are heard. We must return rugby to its rightful owners: the people.**

As it has been said in politics, there are only a few questions that really matter when speaking to an authority:

- Where did you get your power?
- In whose interests do you use it?
- How are you accountable?

Power must belong to the many, not the few. The interests we serve must be those of the players, the fans, the families, and the communities—not the executives and their corporate masters.

**Brighton 7s Festival is about more than hosting a local rugby tournament, it is about providing a platform for radical change across all areas and at all levels of the game.** This manifesto outlines solutions to the problems in the RFU, it is our vision for rugby union globally, and it is what the Brighton 7s Festival will endorse through protest.

As the principals of rugby union state: **our game is built on “an act of spirited defiance”.**

So let us not shrink from this challenge. Let us reclaim our game. Let us fight for a game that serves its people. Let us build a future where this great sport is once again a beacon of fairness, progress, and community.

Because, as always, the power lies in our hands, and the fight is ours to win.

Join us, as we strive for the following:

## **1. Reclaim Rugby: Democratising Governance**

### **1.1. Abolish the Current Rugby Football Union Leadership**

- Immediate removal of all executives and officials responsible for financial mismanagement and lack of transparency.
- Replace the current leadership with a **Rugby People’s Council** composed of:
  - Grassroots club representatives.
  - Player unions.
  - Former players and independent welfare experts.
  - Fan-elected delegates.

### **1.2. Implement Worker-Led Governance**

- Transform RFU governance into a **worker cooperative** where decision-making power lies with players, referees, and grassroots stakeholders.
- End elitist and profit-driven control of the game; implement a **one-member, one-vote** system for strategic decision-making.

### 1.3. Nationalise Elite and Professional Rugby

- Place the Premiership and Championship leagues under **public ownership**, ensuring the sport prioritizes community benefit rather than private profit.
- Redirect commercial revenues into grassroots rugby and player welfare programs.

## 2. Financial Justice: Redistributing Rugby's Wealth

### 2.1. Salary Caps and Redistribution

- Impose a **strict salary cap** for RFU executives, aligned with average worker wages.
- Redistribute funds saved from excessive bonuses and salaries directly into:
  - Community clubs and schools.
  - Women's rugby and underfunded regions.
  - Player health and welfare initiatives.

### 2.2. End Exploitative Sponsorship Deals

- Ban sponsorships from unethical corporations (e.g., fossil fuels, gambling, and exploitative brands) that use 'sports washing' as a marketing tactic.
- Replace commercial partnerships with **public investment** and ethical sponsorships that align with the sport's social values.

## 3. Prioritise Player Welfare: Protecting Lives, Not Profits

### 3.1. Radical Player Welfare Overhaul

- Mandatory implementation of **comprehensive brain injury protocols**, funded through redirected executive salaries.
- Lifetime medical and psychological support for retired and injured players.
- Establish independent **Player Welfare Boards** to oversee safety measures and hold clubs accountable.

### 3.2. Class-Action Accountability

- Support ongoing lawsuits by former players, ensuring full reparations for those suffering from neurological damage.
- Introduce criminal and financial penalties for rugby officials who fail to protect players' health.

### 3.3. Shorten Seasons and Reduce Player Workload

- Implement a **mandatory rest period** between seasons.
- Reduce the number of professional fixtures to prioritise player safety over profits.

## **4. Empower Fans and Grassroots Communities**

### **4.1. Fan Ownership of Clubs**

- Transition all Premiership and Championship clubs to a **fan-owned model**, ensuring that supporters have a say in financial and operational decisions.
- Establish mandatory **community participation** quotas in all club governance boards.

### **4.2. Free and Accessible Rugby Viewing**

- Nationalise rugby broadcasting rights, and provide **free-to-access coverage** of all international and professional matches.
- Ban pay-per-view models that create barriers for low-income fans from enjoying the sport, and provide a free platform for watching all adult, academy, and university rugby.
- Greater accessible facilities for disabled people, including improved pitch-side viewing, parking, and utilities.

### **4.3. Community-Centred Investment**

- Redirect a significant portion of competition revenues into developing rugby facilities in **low-income and underrepresented areas**, both urban and rural.
- Prioritise funding for schools and youth academies to foster the next generation of players.

## **5. Promote Inclusivity and Equality**

### **5.1. Equality for Women's Rugby**

- Equal funding, facilities, and pay for women's professional rugby players and teams.
- Mandatory inclusion of women and non-binary representatives in all decision-making bodies.

### **5.2. Anti-Discrimination Framework**

- Zero-tolerance policies toward racism, sexism, and homophobia in rugby.
- Implement mandatory education programs on inclusivity for stakeholders at all levels of the game.

### **5.3. Diverse Leadership Representation**

- Affirmative action policies to ensure representation of working-class, ethnic minority, and LGBTQ+ individuals in rugby union's decision-making positions.
- Mandate diverse representation in positions of leadership and ensure fair, open, and democratic selection processes for each leadership role.

## 6. A New Vision for Rugby Culture

### 6.1. End Professional Elitism

- Shift rugby's focus from profit-driven professional leagues to fostering community participation, well-being, and inclusivity.

### 6.2. Make Rugby a Tool for Social Change

- Launch programs using rugby to address social inequalities, including education, mental health support, and physical fitness in underserved communities around the world.

### 6.3. Rugby as a Public Good

- Declare rugby a **public good**, enshrining its role in society as a tool for community development, unity, and well-being.

## 7. A Green Future for Rugby: Sustainability and the Environment

### 7.1. Climate Responsibility in Rugby Infrastructure

- Launch a **Green Rugby Infrastructure Fund** to support the transition of all rugby clubs—grassroots and professional—to sustainable, carbon-neutral facilities.
- Prioritise funding for:
  - Solar panel installations on stadiums and clubhouses.
  - Energy-efficient lighting, heating, and waste management systems.
  - Water conservation initiatives, including rainwater harvesting for pitch maintenance.

### 7.2. Carbon Neutral Rugby

- Commit to achieving **net-zero carbon emissions** across the professional game by 2030, ensuring rugby plays its part in tackling the climate crisis.
- Require professional clubs to publish annual **Environmental Impact Reports**, detailing their progress toward carbon reduction.
- Introduce **green audits** for all major rugby events, ensuring that transport, energy, and waste management systems meet strict environmental standards.

### 7.3. Sustainable Travel for Teams and Fans

- Work with public transport providers to ensure affordable and sustainable travel options for teams and fans attending matches.
- Ban unnecessary short-haul flights for club and national teams, replacing them with **green travel alternatives** such as rail where feasible.
- Incentivise fan travel through public transport schemes, bike-share initiatives, and electric vehicle infrastructure at stadiums.

**Enough is enough. Rugby is for the many, not the few.**

Brighton 7s Festival stands on the threshold of a new era, and this manifesto is built on the values we stand for. **It is bold, it is radical, and it is necessary.**

Necessary because we cannot allow another generation of players to suffer the devastating consequences of neglect. Necessary because we cannot allow another generation of young people to be priced out of participation. And necessary because this great game—this *people's game*—belongs not to the elites but to everyone.

It is called rugby UNION for a reason. It unites all shapes and sizes; it unites all kinds of people under one game.

Is Brighton 7s Festival about entertainment? Yes. Is it about justice? Absolutely. But it is also about ambition. **It is about setting out a vision for rugby that is worthy of its potential and encapsulates its true spirit.** A vision where the grassroots thrive, where players are protected, where women's rugby achieves equality, the environment is enhanced, and where fans have the power to shape the game they love.

**Brighton 7s Festival is not afraid to challenge the status quo. We are not afraid to take on the vested interests that hold our sport back.** Because this is not a sport based on fear, cynicism, or selfishness—it is a sport built on rebellion, optimism, and teamwork. The belief that we can build something better, something fairer, something that serves all of us in the game.

**Brighton 7s Festival says this to you, and to the world:** let us take back our game. Let us restore pride, integrity, and ambition to rugby. Let us build a sport that reflects the values we hold dear—hard work, community, equality, and opportunity.

Together, we can achieve this. Together, we can forge a future where rugby is more than a business, more than a commodity—it is once again a game for all, and a game of which we can all be proud.

*Brighton 7s Festival – Sunday the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 2024*

[www.Brighton7sFestival.com](http://www.Brighton7sFestival.com)