



A Road Map to Grow Rugby League Internationally

The Rugby League White Paper

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Abstract

Rugby League lacks a coherent structure around the world and this is what is holding it back as a legitimately recognised sport internationally. There are four areas that need to be addressed and in this White Paper they are looked at and coherent sensible solutions proposed that over time can be built upon. First the governing body, The Rugby League International Federation (RLIF) needs to be streamlined, professionalised and independent of national administrative leaders and needs to have regional governing bodies come into the fold where nations have a greater say. Second a uniform set of laws for the game need to be brought in, not have the three or four that we have now. Third is that the eligibility rules need to be defined and enforced strictly. Fourth but probably the most important, is that there needs to be a coherent set of international tournaments that involved all nations to play the tournaments and promote and grow the game. As it is right now there is a gulf between the top three nations and then everyone else. Ensuring these four key areas in rugby league will not only ensure the sport internationally but also help the sport to combat domestic threats from other sports.

I. Introduction

Rugby League around the world is facing many obstacles in its growth, not only domestically but internationally. Many of these obstacles, however, are not external but internal. There is a distinct lack of vision within the sport from not only national governing bodies but also from its regional and international bodies. The Rugby League International Federation (RLIF)¹, is supposed to be the governing body of the sport around the world, but in fact it has a very little structure, influence or power. Aside from the Rugby League European Federation (RLEF)², there is no other real formal regional association. There is a loose association of the Middle Eastern and North African countries, but there is no central organisation there. There is supposedly a Pacific federation announced in 2009 but nothing has been heard since³.

In the last few years there has been some attempt by the RLIF and RLEF to try and bring in a more formal structure in the tournament structure. A series of Pacific and European Cups was meant to bring nations closer to playing Australia, New Zealand and England in an expanded four nation, this kind of exposure nations need, but the momentum has been lost with the Rugby League players association (RLPA) in 2012 effectively banning any NRL player from participating in tournaments (except Australia vs. New Zealand). The reason is to stop player burn out. This effective bullying of the RLIF and the sport worldwide is worrying and shows where the real power lies in Rugby League, and that is in Australia and the clubs.

The RLIF, as the governing body should step in and demand that they release the players, but in the RLIF there is massive conflict of interest where the governing administrators are paid and have loyalties to other National Rugby League Federations. In any other democratic process and



organisation this would not be allowed and in fact would be illegal. Currently it is members of the NZRL, NRL, ARL, RFL, Super League, FFRXIII and PNGRFL that sit on the RLIF board, and the last two have only been added recently as a token gesture.

The \$5m of profit that supposedly was made at the 2008 World Cup⁴ has not been heard of since. In fact there has been no formal audit of the World Cup and its profits or no annual reports of the RLIF in any way that has been made public for its fans and members to view and comment on. This is something that is done by all other major sports around the world. The Pacific Cup^{5,6} was supposedly funded \$1m from these profits^{7,8}. The rest of the money the rugby league public does not know where it has gone. One has to assume that the 2010 European Cup would have had some funding as well from this, maybe to the tune of \$1m but no one knows. This leaves approximately \$3m left that no one knows what has been done with it. Is this money going to the funding of the 2013 World Cup? Nothing has been mentioned.

International Rugby league also suffers from the lack of eligibility enforcement by the RLIF. Right now in the four year window between world cup, a player is able to play for multiple countries. Hence we have the silly situation where a player such as Akuila Uate who played in the 2008 World Cup for Fiji as well as in the 2009 Pacific Cup and in 2010 for Fiji, he is allowed to switch allegiance to Australia and played State of Origin and for the Kangaroos in 2011 and is now ineligible to play for Fiji if he is not selected in the Kangaroos team^{9,10}. This has been the norm with many players and nations, where we have seen Danny Brough also switch allegiances¹¹, Jaryd Hayne in the space of one year played for Australia and Fiji and then Australia again before the world cup and Fuifui Moimoi during the 2008 world Cup year attempted a switch from Tonga to New Zealand back to Tonga all in one year as well¹². Most recently along with Uate Anthony Minichello, who played for NSW in the 2011 State of Origin, a match which is regarded as good as playing for Australia, was able to play for Italy in the 2013 World Cup Qualifiers in October and November of 2011. Funnily there was no mention he had to make any case to the RLIF. So a player played for 2 nations effectively in less than 6 months.

Rugby League is experiencing great growth around the world. In Europe on the back of individuals and help from the RLIF we have seen that region grow from just 3 real Rugby League playing nations to nearly 20. In Asia in the last year we have seen also individuals start the sport in Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines and Vanuatu. In the Middle east Lebanon is spearheading the growth there and sees the sport now played in Palestine, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates in some capacity as well as Morocco. Canada has rejoined the fold and Jamaica is coming along nicely. It is clear to see that, despite the great growth that Rugby League is seeing in the world, it still has no coherence and no strong governing body to sort out its issues.

Most recently we have seen that there are rival factions in Papua New Guinea fighting for control of the sport^{13,14} and the RLIF is desperately trying to sort it out¹⁵. In the USA^{16,17}, clubs not happy by having no say in the way things are run, and that the AMNRL¹⁸ was effectively run by a monopoly, split to form the USARL¹⁹, this has caused many debate within the Rugby league community and not only split clubs, players, administrators, but also the fans and in such a crucial market is disastrous. Italy has seen a similar split^{20,21,22,23,24} for similar reasons and both sides claim wins in the Rugby league civil war.

So it is clear that something needs to be done and this White Paper aims to set up in a coherent manner 4 important things that need to be done to ensure that Rugby League not only stabilises, but also grows internationally and provides a way forward for the sport in the community and also to



combat encroachment of other sports who actively still try to destroy the sport. It is a more coherent summary of some articles that I have published in Rugby League International Scores in 2009 and 2010^{25, 26, 27, 28}. In section II, I will discuss how the RLIF needs to become an independent, professional organisation that is not controlled by a few organisations with conflicts. Section III looks at the rule eligibility while section IV tackles the problem rules not being uniform, right now there are several rules in Rugby League that are used by different nations. Section V, I set out a series of tournaments that not only allow nations to play at their level but also to move up through the ranks to play in regional and international tournaments but it's done in a concise logical manner where all matches effectively are World Cup qualifiers. In section VI, I will try to look at the expenses that would be needed for this. Sections VII and VIII, I will discuss and bring together these ideas with an example how it will help the sport and also draw some conclusion before ending.

II. Rugby League European Federation (RLIF)

Currently the Rugby League International Federation (RLIF) is made up of effectively volunteers. No one on the RLIF is paid by the RLIF, they are all paid by other governing bodies of national Rugby Leagues. Currently the RLIF consist of²⁹:

Chairman	Scott Carter	<i>NZRL</i>
Deputy Chairman	Richard Lewis	<i>Super League and RFL</i>
Secretary	Andrew Hill	<i>ARL</i>
Member of Executive	David Gallop	<i>NRL and ARL</i>
Member of Executive	John Numapo	<i>PNGRFL</i>
Member of Executive	Nicolas Larrat	<i>FFRXIII</i>
Int. Development Officer	Tas Baitieri ³⁰	<i>ARL and NSWRL</i> ³¹

As it can be seen there is a clear conflict of interest with every single person on there. All the decision makers in the RLIF are aligned with the top 5 leading national rugby league powers, in particular five out of the seven are aligned with the three most powerful National Rugby League federations, the Australian Rugby League (ARL), National Rugby League (NRL in Australia), New Zealand Rugby League (NZRL) and Rugby Football League (RFL in England). Decisions that have been made in the last ten years that clearly are weighted to benefit these nations. This are mainly in the eligibility laws, where as mentioned before nations like Australia are basically able to bribe players to align themselves with their nations through incentives like State of Origin and the Kangaroos, Kiwis and lions where the thought of a greater pay day looms (this, however, be moot in the future, reports in 2012 suggest that the Kangaroos have not been paid for the 2011 four nations³²).

Restructure

The 2008 World Cup saw the sport for the first time have a profit and a supposed war chest. This is not much of a war chest compared to football (soccer) or rugby union, where they operate on significantly larger profits each year. However the \$5m that, as mentioned in section I, has been used to fund tournaments like the Pacific and European Cups. This was a missed opportunity I feel. This money would have been much better spent actually putting in a proper professional, independent RLIF where its controlling members are not aligned with any national Rugby League federation and most importantly they are paid by the RLIF full time to control the sports eligibility rules, its playing laws and getting the sponsorship dollars to pay for itself, the sport internationally and also to coordinate any international matches and tournaments.

A similar structure would come into the regional federations as well. They would be responsible for the regional tournaments and sponsorship that pays for the game and nations in those regions. The international structure that I envisage is shown in figure 1, where you have the RLIF, that controls the Regional federations like the RLEF, and in turn the regional federation support and control the national federations.

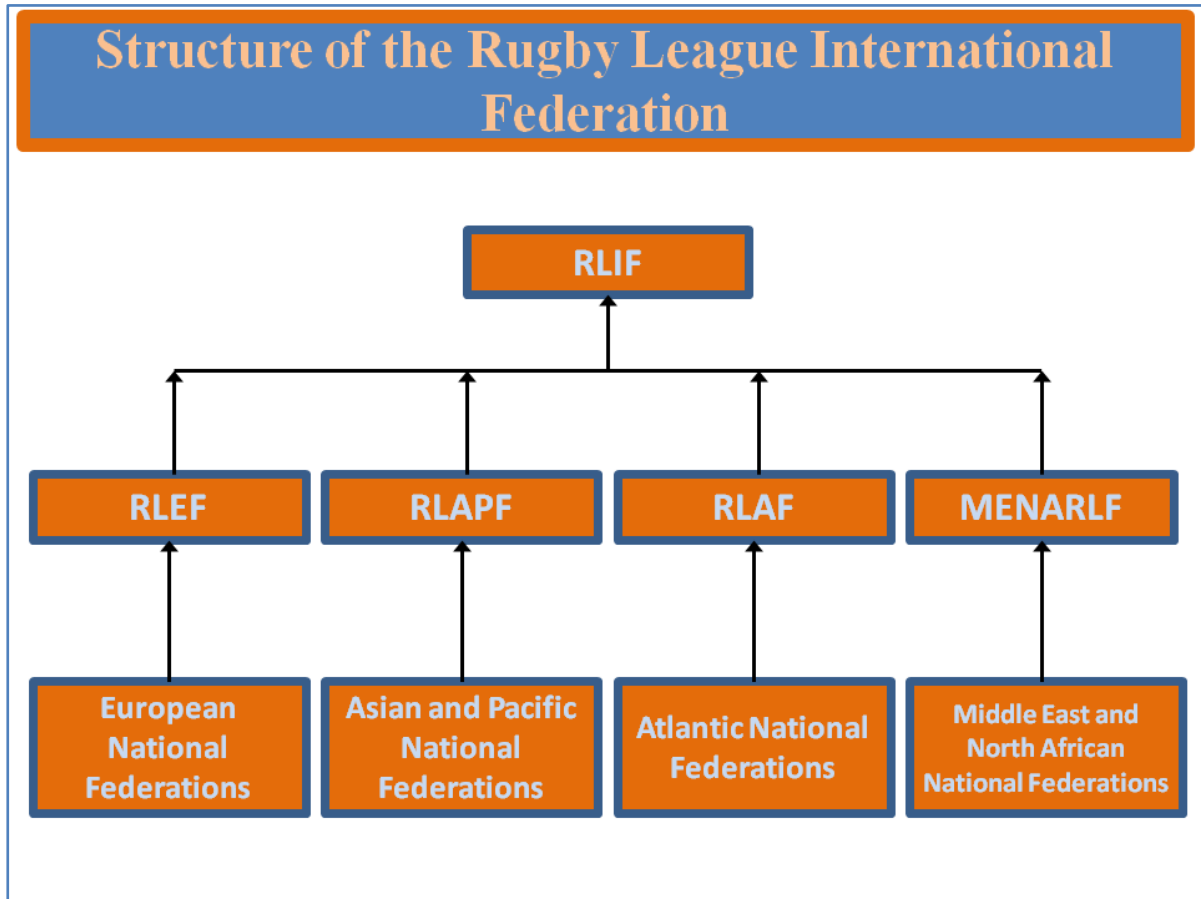


Figure 1: International Federation structure where the RLIF is fed by the Regional federations which in turn are fed by the national federations.

The actual RLIF structure, though would not be too different to what is in place now, though would consist of 5 independent administrators and one member from each of the regional controlling federations. This would look like:

Chairman	<i>Voting</i>
Vice Chairman	<i>Voting</i>
Treasurer	<i>Voting</i>
Secretary	<i>Voting</i>
Member of Executive	<i>Voting</i>
Rugby League European Federation member	<i>Voting</i>
Rugby League Asia-Pacific Asia Federation member	<i>Voting</i>
Rugby League Middle East-Nth African Federation member	<i>Voting</i>
Rugby League Atlantic Federation member	<i>Voting</i>
International Development Officer	<i>Non-voting</i>
Promotion and Relations	<i>Non-voting</i>
Web design	<i>Non-voting</i>



The nine voting members mean that they can decide on things in the sport, the four members of the regional federations provide a voice for the regional countries and the issues that dictate them. While the remaining five are involved in the running of the game internationally, getting sponsorship for tournaments and also grants to nations and regional federations as well as the running of the RLIF itself. The International development officer who looks after specific of the game where new countries are starting out would be a non-voting member but have input and advice into changes needed in the sport.

It is also imperative also that there is a full time PR and dedicated web designer and the RLIF website be updated every day. At the moment, once again, the RLIF website has not been updated in several months and this is unacceptable, to potential sponsors this would be a detriment seeing that the organisation is not professional. This has to change. The PR and Web managers would be non-voting position in the RLIF.

Tournaments

The running of tournaments will come under two levels, the regional and international championships. The way that this is envisaged is:

Regional Championships

European Cup	<i>RLEF</i>
Asia-Pacific Cup	<i>RLAPF</i>
Atlantic Cup	<i>RLAP</i>
Middle East and Nth Africa Cup	<i>RLMENAF</i>

International Championships

RLIF Cup	<i>RLIF</i>
Federation Cup	<i>RLIF</i>
World Cup	<i>RLIF</i>

The structure of these tournaments and how they all lead into each other will be covered in section V, where I will show how all these tournament link in with each other and effectively every game is a qualifier for the World Cup. The three tournaments that the RLIF would look after would be funded by the sponsorship and money that it is able to make through past tournaments. This would be similar for the European federation and their tournament.

The 2008 Rugby League world cup offered the first opportunity for this structure to come into play, and once again it was missed. A \$5m profit was made and this money should have been used in 2009 to restructure and professionalise the RLIF and the whole international structure. From there a professional 100% dedicated team could have started to bring in more money into the sport. The question I will leave this section on “**What is better, to always depend on one tournament to make a small profit to feed the international game or to have a dedicated team bringing money every year**”. It’s a case of *\$5m for 5 years or \$5m every year*. What is better, I know what I would prefer.

III. Eligibility Rules

Current Rugby League eligibility rules make no sense. Players are able to switch between nations of eligibility at will. Even though originally the RLIF had laid out a good set of eligibility rules, this was basically thrown out the window with Australia and New Zealand poaching players that had



already been selected for other nations and then allowing players to switch nations once between world cups^{33, 34}.

The grandparent rule that is in place is not a problem. This rule actually is in place in all international sports. I understand that a player can be eligible for two nations. That is OK, but what needs to happen in that when a player makes a choice to play for one nation then he needs to stick with that nations. The way this will happen is through several ways:

1. Once a player chooses a nation to play, by representing that nation in any sort of RLIF sanctioned tournament, then those players are locked into that nation, at least for the 4 year cycle from one world cup to the next.
2. If a player does want to switch, then he must sit out four (4) years, and not play any internationals. This means that they are not involved in any international matches, since they will all effectively be world cup games, if this means that the player needs to sit out a world cup, then so be it.
3. Match payments for internationals are handles through the RLIF. The payments are standardised through the RLIF for all the nations, so players get paid equally at whatever level they play at.
4. Games like State of Origin in Australia do not count towards national selection and thus players that do play for these representative games are still eligible for their international selection.

If these four simple points are in place and adhered to then the international game will stabilise in terms of players, the developing teams will become stronger by having quality players turn out and represent them on a more regular basis and thus the sport will start to have much more even competition where more and more of the developing nations can compete with Australia, New Zealand and England.

IV. Uniformity of Rugby League Rules

At present there are at least three sets of Rugby League laws that are used. The National Rugby League (NRL) at the moment has different sets of rules to what the Super League (ESL) and the minor leagues in Australia play to. There is also the case that any internationals are played to a different set as well and most of the developing nations are playing in fact to the international rules.

Now the issue here is not which rules are the best ones to use or not, that is not a case to be made here, but we have to finally agree to one set of rules that all nations, and i emphasise, all nations agree to and implement and play under. These have to be able to be used by all countries.

An example is the two referees that the NRL uses, no other nations can do this since they do not have the resources to implement two referees. Another example is the corner posts, Australia the posts do not come into play so you can hit them and still be in play. This is not the case in other domestic competitions or the international rules as well the 10 interchange rule that is implemented by the NRL is not in the International arena. And Australia continues to play around with the rules in their All-Stars matches.

Why should Australia be so different to England, France, Germany or the USA in what they play? The answer is they shouldn't. This is where a strong and independent RLIF needs to come in and not make any special dispensations in the laws of the sport for any one country like they did in 2009³⁵.

We should have a uniform and concise set of laws that everyone can adhere to and is policed by the RLIF and allows all nations internationally to play competitively without any disadvantage to themselves or any others.

V. Meaningful Tournaments

The most important part of all this is that nations need to have a regular concise and meaningful set of tournaments that give players an incentive to stay with that nation. Also it gives the federations of those nations plus the regional and International federations a way to promote the sport and get sponsorship and money coming into the sport. This money made in these tournaments is used to pay the players which is the monetary incentive for them to stay with one nation while it allows nations to build on any success.

Figure 2 shows a schematic of how this would work. A four year cycle would see a world cup that is played in year zero (which actually is year 4 of the previous cycle) while nations that are not involved in the world cup would start their regional championship qualifiers. In the first year of the cycle would be the next round of regional championship qualifiers, the second year has the regional championships played. These are the tournaments that are run by the regional federations and used to make money for these regional federations and nations. The world cup qualifiers also start in this second year of the cycle, the nations that are not involved in the regional championships would be involved in these qualifiers.



Figure 2: Schematic of the different tournaments in a 4 year cycle between world cups. The Regional championships lead into the international minor tournaments and world cup. This essentially makes every game played a world cup qualifier.

The third year sees two minor internationals played. From the regional qualifiers teams will go into a minor international tournament which I call the RLIF Cup and there are qualifiers played for two spots and then teams that do not qualify will go into a Federation Cup. These two tournaments provide Automatic qualification for the world cup, however provide the ranking for the world cup. There is another separate world cup qualifiers that are done regionally and also lead into the world cup. What makes these tournaments different to what we have now and important to making money is that all nations are involved, so Australia, New Zealand and England are involved in all aspects of the international tournaments that are played.

For a 16 team world cup, six spots are taken up automatically by the RLIF Cup, four are taken by the Federation cup, 2 by European qualifiers, another 2 by the Asia-Pacific Qualifiers, and one each by the Atlantic and Mena qualifiers.

Example – European Cup

An example I would like to use to show how the four year cycle will work is with the European Cup. This is the regional championships and would be run by the Rugby League European Federation (RLEF). If we take the current nations and their ranking roughly they would be: 1. England, 2. France, 3. Wales, 4. Scotland, 5. Ireland, 6. Italy, 7. Serbia, 8. Russia, 9. Norway, 10. Germany, 11. Malta, 12. Latvia, 13. Ukraine, 14. Czech Republic, 15. Sweden, 16. Denmark, 17. Netherlands and 18. Portugal.

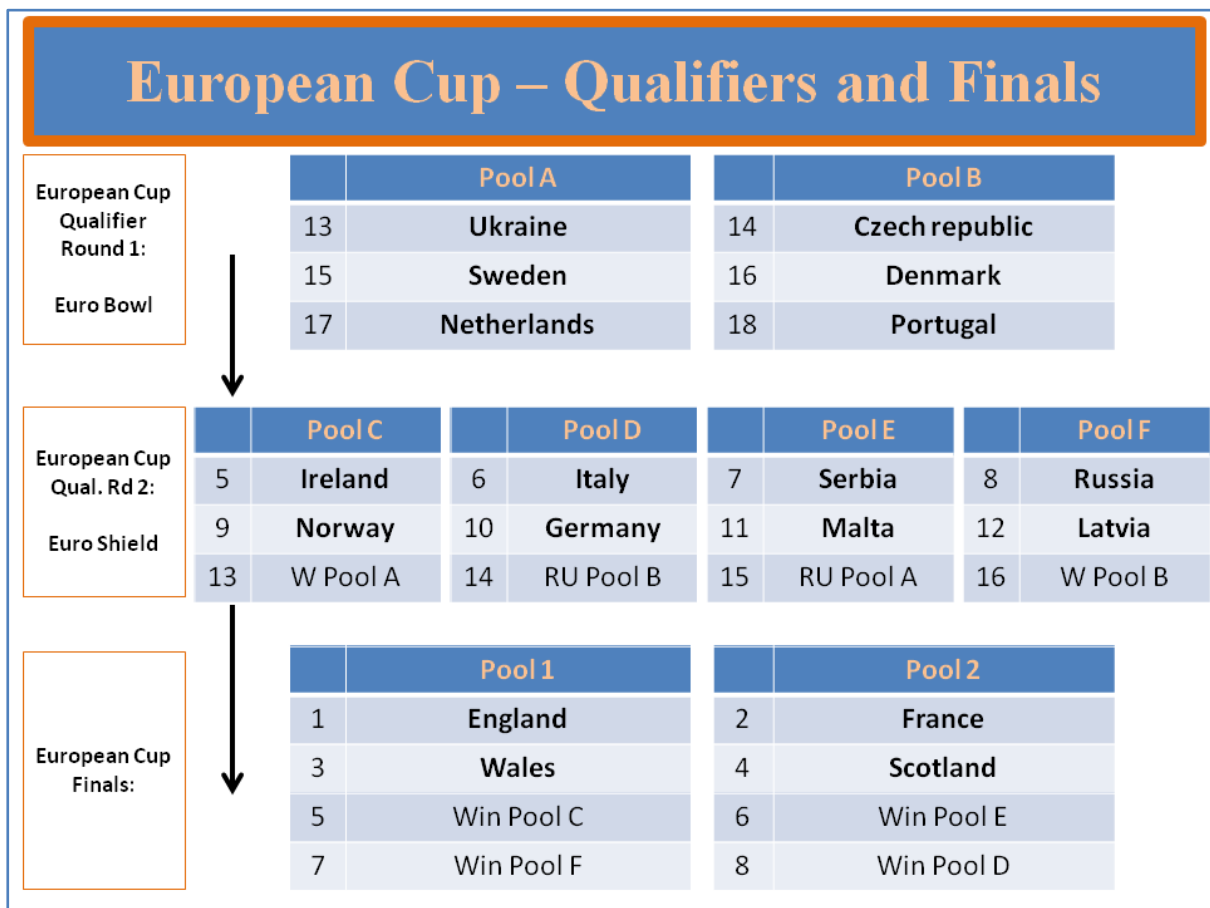


Figure 3: Flow diagram showing how the European Cup will work with qualifiers through two levels to the finals that have the final 8 teams.



The way the game will be structured is in three levels as shown in figure 3. Teams are seeded by the rank of the nations. Four teams will have automatic qualification into the finals. The host nation will have one automatic spot while the top three nations then will have the next automatic positions. If one of the host nations is in the top four, then it is the top four nations that will gain the automatic qualifications.

The next level of qualifiers will see the next eight ranked nations spread through four groups, and in keeping with tradition I will call these the European Shield tournaments. There are four groups of three teams where the last four spots will be filled by earlier qualifiers which sees the last six ranked nations play in two groups of four nations. Again keeping with tradition I will call these the European Bowl.

Thus in Year 0 the six teams in the first level of qualifiers play. There are two groups of four where the top two in each group move onto the qualifiers in the next year. The winners of each of the groups in Year 1 then go on to qualification for the European Cup Final which is played in Year 2.

The nations in the finals then play in two groups of four where the top two teams in each group go onto the semi finals. The two finalists get automatic qualification into the RLIF Cup while the 3rd placed nations goes into a qualifying tournament for the RLIF cup where the 3rd placed Asia-Pacific Nation also goes and the winners of the MENA Cup and Atlantic Cup. The 4th placed team goes into the Federation Cup where they will also meet the 4th placed nation from Asia-Pacific and the two nations that do not qualify for the RLIF Cup.

At this point also, for the nations that have not gone onto the European Cup qualifiers, the European Zone World Cup qualifiers would also start. This way all nations are basically involved in internationals every year. All the matches here are important to qualifying in the world cup and thus would go towards ranking points.

This system would work for the other regional tournaments as well. Since they all are not as big as Europe, yet, there is room for them to grow. For example The Atlantic Zone with only 4 nations would only have a finals to start with, but as it grows with more nations, then more and more groups can be set up through the qualifying years. The Asia-Pacific Federation is big enough to be like Europe while MENA will have qualifiers only in Year 1 and the finals in Year 2. As with the other nations there would also be room for growth there also.

Example – RLIF Cup and Federation Cup

The idea of the RLIF Cup is similar to the Continental Cup in Soccer and the International Cup in Cricket. It's an international tournament where nations can play each other in a competition other than a regional one. While it is not as big as the world cup it's the first test for many of the nations against the best teams to see at what level they need to be for the world cup.

The RLIF and Federation Cup have two levels to them as is shown in figure 4. The Qualification for the RLIF Cup is straight forward. The RLIF Cup has two groups of three teams, so that is six teams all together. The top two nations from the European Cup and Asia-Pacific cup would get automatic qualification into the RLIF Cup while the third placed team from the European Cup and Asia-Pacific Cup would go into a four team play off for the last two positions in the RLIF Cup. The last two positions in the qualifications would be made up by the winners of the Atlantic Cup and the MENA Cup. Over time these qualifications and the RLIF Cup certainly can grow.

The Federation Cup would be a secondary tournament that allows the nations that came fourth in the European and Asia-Pacific Cup to also have an international tournament. The last two spots in the Federation Cup would come from the two nations that did not qualify into RLIF Cup. The RLIF and Federation Cups would be played at the same time together at the same venues. Since the RLIF Cup with the two groups of three and a final would have seven matches is the same as the Federation Cup, where there would be six round matches and a final. The Federation Cup would be the opening match to a night of international Rugby League and it gives the opportunity to have 10 international teams from all over the world to be showcased in the one spot, Europe, Asia/Pacific, Middle East/Africa and Atlantic/America.

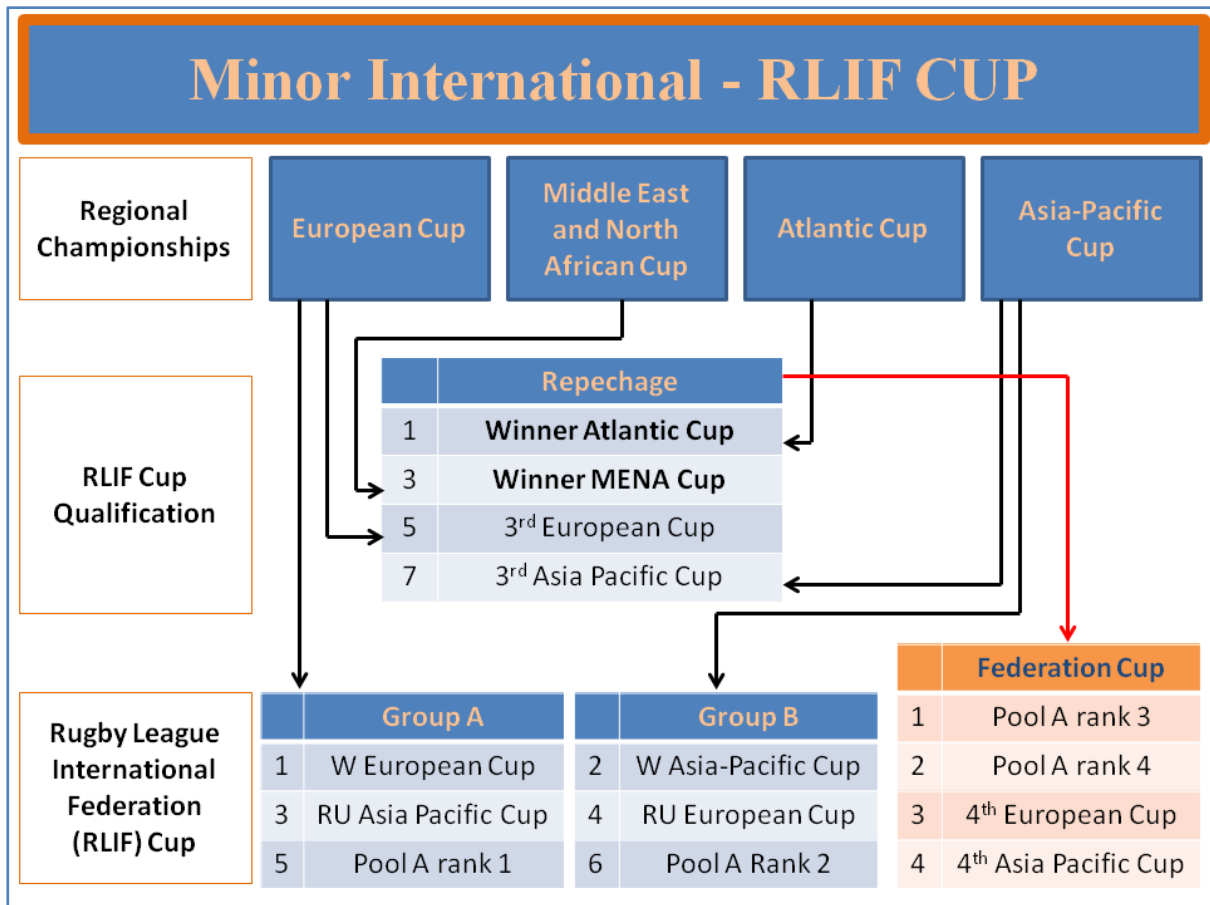


Figure 4: Flow chart showing how the RLIF and Federation Cups have qualifiers from the regional championships and qualify for the World Cup.

Both of these tournaments would have automatic qualification into the Rugby League World Cup and would provide the some of the ranking that goes into the World Cup. Thus it can be seen how a team from the initial regional qualifications can win through to eventually qualify for the World Cup and how every single one of these matches is important and counts for something. These matches provide valuable and meaningful international matches for all nations and with prize winnings (discussed in section VI) can pay for their travel and start to build up money to run their sports nationally.

Example - World Cup

As has been discussed above with the RLIF and Federation Cups these are two ways that nations can qualify for the World Cup. The other way is through regional World Cup qualifiers where nations that have not been involved in the Regional Championships Finals or the RLIF and federation Cups.

Using Europe as an example once again, in year 2 of the tournament cycle, the 10 nations in Europe that aren't involved in the European Cup would play in qualifying groups. Four groups of three nations are involved and 2 it allows any new nations that want to come in that didn't have a chance though the European Cup can also have a chance to participate, The top nations in these groups then go onto meet the four nations that didn't make the semi finals of the European Cup to meet in a second round of qualifiers while the RLIF and Federation Cups are in progress. The top nations in the two groups would then get qualification into the World Cup. This is shown clearly in a flow chart in figure 5.



Figure 5: A flow chart showing the process to qualify to the Rugby League World Cup using a regional process. The teams that did not make the European Cup final would be involved.

Similar qualification processes would be present with the other regions. The Asia-Pacific region is the next biggest and would end up having two spots as well. While the Atlantic and MENA regions are smaller, they will have one spot each in the World Cup. Thus the Rugby League World Cup will have 16 teams take part in the tournament.

The Rugby League World Cup

The qualification process to the Rugby League World Cup has been covered extensively now, the actual structure of the Rugby league World Cup Can now be discussed. With a sixteen team world

cup, it makes sense to have a four group with 4 team structure where nations are spread through the four groups according to their ranking. As is shown in figure 6 the groups have the teams ranks from the top through to the regional qualifiers.

As with any of these type of tournaments the idea is that the top nations make it through to the quarter finals and eventually you want to have the top 2 nations get to the final of the world cup.

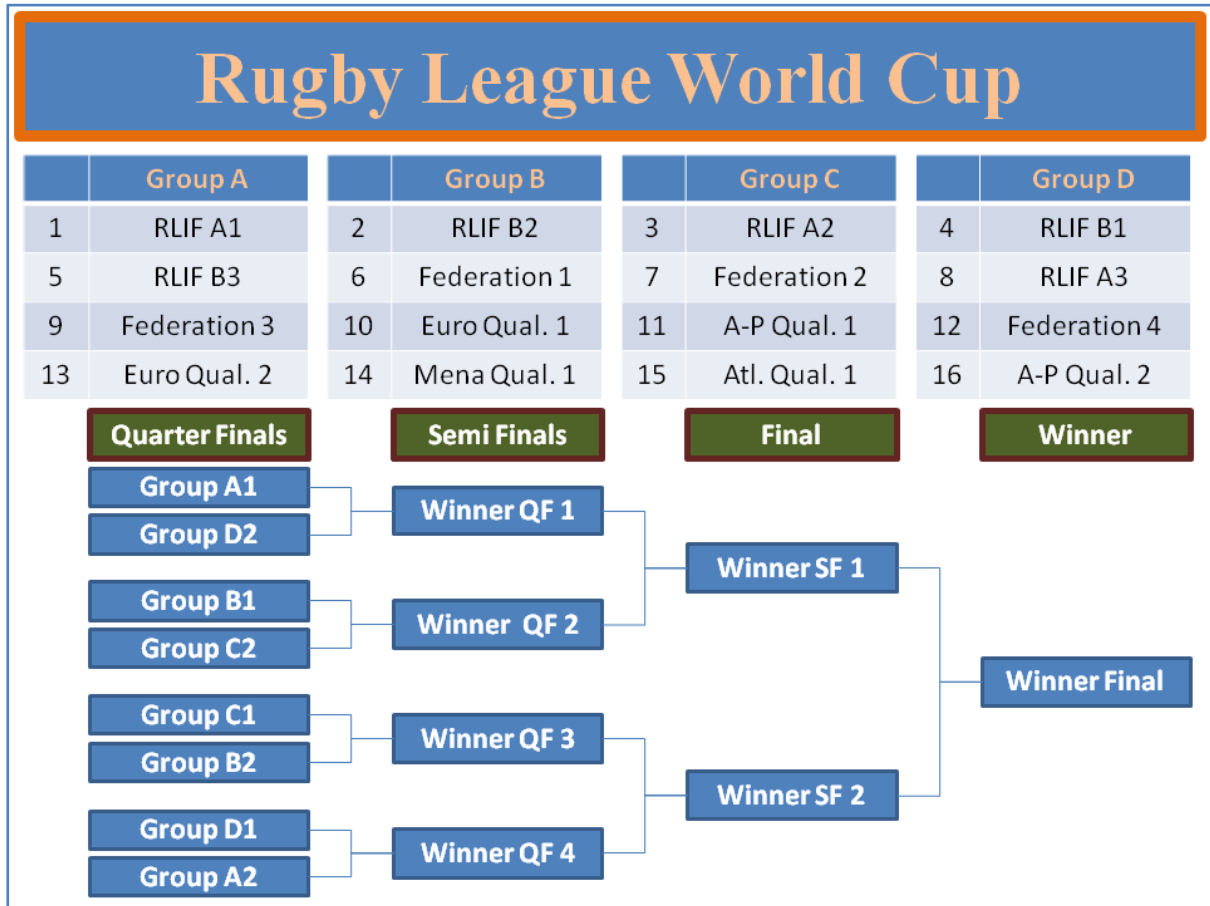


Figure 6: The World Cup structure showing the group staged and quarter finals, semi finals and final. Consistency through the years ensures a nation gets the best possible position to make the finals in the World Cup.

The interesting note to come out of all the qualifiers to the world cup is that consistency of the four years is paramount. A team with one off performances may no necessarily get to the final. A team has to perform at the top of it game to qualify through to the regional championships, then onto the RLIF Cup to get the best ranked position in the World Cup to win through to the final.

The top two nations of each group go through to the quarter finals as is shown in figure 6 and these then go through to the semi finals and finals. A 3rd/4th match is also played to determine the top four nations in the world.

While the World Cup is going on, the next round of regional qualifiers begins, thus nearly all nations in the Rugby League world will be involved that year in meaningful international tournaments.

VI. Expenses



All this though needs to have funding. As I have mentioned above several times, the International game and also the International and Regional Federations need to have money to be able to host such tournaments. This will only happen, however, if we can get the right amount of sponsorship. This should happen with a proper tournament structure to attract the sponsors.

A simple prize money calculation for all nations at all levels, let us take an example in Europe, we can see what it will take to fund international Rugby League. On average it costs about \$50k to have a national team to travel and participate in a tournament. Thus the two teams that drop out at the earliest stage get \$50k for their travel, that is \$100k needed. The next 8 teams that don't make it to the finals all get \$75k which brings in another \$600k. The four teams that don't make the semis in the regional tournaments get \$100k each so there is \$400k there and then the two semi finalists get \$125k, the runner up gets \$150k and the winner \$200k. This brings in a grand total of \$1.70m as prize money for the European Cup. Remember this is over 3 years.

Let's assume that the other three regional tournaments prize money also comes to the same value, though in reality at the start it probably won't, but this brings the prize money costs for regional tournaments to \$6.80m.

In the RLIF Cup the two teams that come third in their groups will earn another \$100k, while the teams that came in second place in each group get \$150k and then the runner up gets \$200k and the winner \$300k. This brings the total amount of prize money for the RLIF cup to \$1.00m.

The Federation Cup has the third and fourth placed teams to get \$100k and the runner up gets \$150k while the winner gets \$200k. This brings a grand total for the Federation Cup to \$550k. Thus in the two minor internationals it is about \$1.55m.

The Rugby League World Cup being the biggest of the internationals needs to provide the bigger prize money. Teams that come 4th in their group get \$100k while teams that come 3rd get \$150k. This brings it to \$1.00m so far. The Quarter final losers get \$200k each while the 4th places team gets \$250k and the 3rd placed team gets \$350k. The runner up gets \$500k and the winner gets \$1m. Over all the prize money for the Rugby League World Cup comes to \$3.80m.

Adding up the money from all these tournaments the Prize money needed comes to \$12.15m. If we factor in a little over \$1m for each of the seven tournaments to host them (as this seems to be the case, as shown by the Pacific Cup) then the overall amount of money needed in the four years to run international Rugby League is approximately \$20m. Thus \$5m needs to be found by the RLIF and regional federations to run the sport. This comes out to about \$1m per year of sponsorship which when it comes down to it should be easy enough to do. Even if it is boosted to \$2m a year it should not be that difficult to raise that money if the right people are at the helm.

VII. Discussion

The intention of this White Paper is to provide a blue print and guide to where Rugby League should be going. The four to five previous sections that have discussed the issues in the sport lead to several aspects that will allow Rugby League to be a competitive sport and be able to fight off attacks from other sports particularly in Australia.

AFL is the biggest rival in Australia, and it seems that currently the ARL and NRL are completely not using one asset they have. That is the International game. Having a strong international game as discussed above will mean that that sport can use that to attract better sponsors and keep juniors and



players within the sport since they will be able to represent a country in a proper legitimate international tournament. This is something that AFL definitely does not have at the moment and it's something that we can start to world towards around the world to compete with Rugby Union.

Meaningful tournaments

Meaningful tournaments provide a means for players to stay within the sport. It does not matter which nation they represent, by seeing that they can represent the country of birth, heritage or choice and be proud doing so by participating in meaningful tournaments that lead to a world cup is a great asset to have.

This idea can be shown by the domestic competitions with juniors, showing them how their heroes play for these nations. Also any player that are able to represent a nation, not just the Kangaroos, Kiwis and Lions, but other nations, be paid for their efforts and that they can go onto play on the biggest stage, in front of big crowds has to be another great incentive.

This will also help to promote the sport in the nations they represent and thus build up the sport domestically there and start producing more and more professional and semi-professional competitions and players with abilities where they have been raised playing Rugby League. Once again fans and commentators like in Australia and England where they complain there are not enough quality players in the sport, having more nations with players opens up new opportunities for players to come through.

Nation development – bidding for tournaments

This structure of international Rugby League also provides a unique opportunity to host international tournaments in different places. As happens with the Olympics, Commonwealth Games, Soccer and Rugby Union World Cups, nations can bid to host the tournaments.

Aside from major nations like Australia and England where the sport has been hosted numerous times, places like Fiji, France Papua New Guinea and the United States, after showing they can host a regional tournament successfully can bid for the World Cup. It can also give incentive for some of the developing nations to have their governments invest in infrastructure to host a tournament. As has been seen in the Pacific Cup in 2009, the successful hosting of that tournament spurred the PNG government to look at upgrading the ground in Port Moresby³⁶.

Countries like the USA could quite likely be future World Cup hosts, if they can prove to host a tournament where the grounds are at truly international standards and not American Football grounds or drastically smaller fields in baseball stadiums. If proper Rugby grounds can be found and used then there is no reason why the USA can't host a tournament.

So the sport in this structure it can provide great incentive for nations to further infrastructure and show they can host a tournament.

Tournament Control

The tournaments would come under the control of the different federations. Regional Championships will be under the control of the Regional Federations. They should provide the people to plan and host the tournaments as well as money so as no one nation has to take all the burden.



The RLIF will look after the RLIF Cup, The Federation Cup and also the World Cup. Like the regional Championships, they should have the people to organise the tournaments or at the very least have them help the local organisers organise a great tournament that will make money for all parties involved.

Tours

In the previous section there is one standout omission, and that is the traditional Rugby League tour. As much as I did like the old Kangaroos and Lions tours, in reality they were probably the single most thing that was holding Rugby League back as an international sport. Rugby League tours are an old archaic, egalitarian form of poaching players from themselves and leaves absolutely no room for any new nation to come into the fold and challenge any established country.

All a tour does is give only 3 or four superpowers the ability to play and so the only incentive to new players that come from other countries is to switch to say a New Zealand, Australia or England/Britain only because that is where they will get the best matches. For the growth of the sport internationally this is a flawed, dangerous and small minded attitude to have.

Thus, I have no tours for the top national teams. Clubs and development teams from nations certainly can have them, and should be encouraged there, but at the top flight, it should be just tournaments where all nations have the chance to qualify through to the play the best of the best and be the best of the best.

A side note here, as well, the year after a world cup the chances are that one of the top 4 or 5 nations will have automatic qualification into the regional championship finals anyway. I would hazard a guess that say in Europe, England, France, Wales and Scotland may be there while in the Asia-Pacific its Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. Many of these nations have their players in the NRL and Super League and with the RLPA making noise about resting players for a year, this would be the ideal time for this to happen. You rest players after a long international campaign, not before it.

A Rugby league Road Map

It should be clear that from all of this that a clear road map is present. The RLIF and others look at 5 year plans or 10 year plans. This Road Map is one that looks beyond, by having a concise four year cycle of meaningful tournaments it allows the regional governing bodies and nations to be able to plan well beyond. This is a *Road Map* for Rugby League and is, as far as am I am aware, the first and only such road map where the game has been thought out in a concise manner beyond just a few years, where all regions and nations are considered together as a whole and not just individually or regionally.

Below is how the *Road Map* would look like, how the tournaments would overlap through the years. The colour coding signifies a block of tournaments in the four year cycle:

- 2013 – *World Cup – Regional Qualifiers Begin*
- 2014 – *Regional Qualifiers*
- 2015 – *Regional Championships – World Cup Qualifiers*
- 2016 – *RLIF Cup – Federation Cup – World Cup Qualifiers*
- 2017 – *World Cup – Regional Qualifiers Begin*
- 2018 – *Regional Qualifiers*



- 2019 – *Regional Championships – World Cup Qualifiers*
- 2020 – *RLIF Cup – Federation Cup – World Cup Qualifiers*
- 2021 – *World Cup – Regional Qualifiers Begin*
- 2022 – *Regional Qualifiers*
- 2023 – *Regional Championships – World Cup Qualifiers*
- 2024 – *RLIF Cup – Federation Cup – World Cup Qualifiers*
- 2025 – *World Cup – Regional Qualifiers Begin*
- etc...

Of course nations do not have to always participate in tournaments. There can be circumstances where money is tight and a nation may decide not to compete in the Regional championships, however by having the separate world Cup qualifiers, it still allows those nations to still qualify for the world cup. There is much flexibility in this road map, in essence you have an express lane as well as regular lanes that nations can take.

VIII. Conclusions

International Rugby League stands on the cusp of going forward and being a dynamic international sport or be relegated once again for a number of years as a sport seen to be played only on the East coast of Australia, Auckland in New Zealand, Northern England and small towns in southern France. To go forward though, Rugby League need to install and independent and professional RLIF that is able to really take control and guide the sport. Meaningful tournaments need to be installed as well as a unified set of international rules that all nations play to. The eligibility rules, which are the most farcical at the moment, need to be overhauled.

If these four things are done then Rugby League will have a great platform to defend itself against attacks from other sports. Also it will mean that players should turn out for their chosen nations and not swap every year just to get a payday. This will further mean that more nations will start to equalize and rather than three teams we can have ten competitive teams playing in Rugby League.

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Having been born and grown up in Sydney, Australia and then in Brisbane, Australia, Daniel grew up with Rugby League and is an avid Cronulla Sharks supporter and lover of the International Game. In 2006 when working at the Max-Planck Institute for Plasma Physics, Greifswald, Germany, he made contact with Rugby League Deutschland, other national federations, Rugby League European Federation (RLEF) and the Rugby League International Federation (RLIF).

Daniel saw that there was a need for a website to have all the results from every nation in the one place. This spurred Daniel to create Rugby League International Scores and since then it has become one of the main websites for information on international results and news and his commentary on the sport has many dedicated followers.