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# GUIDE ON CONSIDERING AN ACADEMY AGREEMENT OR PLAYING CONTRACT

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**NZRPA**  
NEW ZEALAND RUGBY PLAYERS' ASSOCIATION

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In considering any contract, but especially a player's first Contract, a player and their family should make sure they get access to the information and independent advice and support they need to make good decisions. The NZRPA provides access to this information and advice – please contact us on **0800 PLAYER** or visit our website [www.nzrpa.co.nz](http://www.nzrpa.co.nz)

Below we have highlighted a number of factors that any player should take into account when considering a Playing Contract. While the factors are relevant to all players they are essential for young players in particular and as such the paper is more prevalent to them.

If you wish you can contact the NZRPA on **0800 PLAYER** and we will arrange someone to sit down and take you through this advice.

Every person is different and there can be no one rule for everyone when considering an academy, development or playing contract, especially for the first time.

However there are a standard set of factors that everyone should consider as a minimum.

- 01 A player's Support Network
- 02 Holistic Development - making sure you develop off field skills and career options
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- 11 Market Knowledge and Independent Advice

Over the next few pages we provide some commentary on why these factors are important.

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## 01 A Player's Support Network

Young players especially need a good support network if they are going to make the most of the opportunities presented by an Academy program and / or professional rugby playing contract. In considering where they will be based a player needs to ensure that they will get access to a strong support network that will help them train, play and develop as best they can.

A player who is well organised and supported off the field will perform better on it.

This may involve staying close to their family because traditionally this is a player's strongest and most reliable support network.

So whatever contract you are considering make sure you will have a strong support network available to you, because at some stage you will need to rely on them. While an academy program or professional playing contract offers great opportunities it is not easy and nothing is guaranteed!

## 02 Holistic Development - making sure you develop off field skills and career options

Making sure you do not put all your eggs in one basket so to speak. It is crucial in professional rugby that players are developing themselves off the field. This means not only making sure a player is learning the skills needed to be a successful professional rugby player but also undertaking meaningful study, work or career development initiatives.

It means that a player is not just focusing on rugby but also developing skills to help the player better manage their professional rugby career but also an option to fall back on at the end of his playing days especially if they end early through injury or illness.

Better people make better players – having interests outside of rugby and maintaining a balance is important to becoming a good rugby player.

So when considering where to base yourself and play your rugby make sure that you will be able to pursue your interest outside of rugby no matter what they are i.e. education, apprenticeships, work experience, career development. The NZRPA can help you here through the Professional Development Program (see [www.nzrpa.co.nz](http://www.nzrpa.co.nz)).

## 03 The Work Environment

To train, develop and play well a player needs to enjoy their environment. Rugby environments are all different; they have their different cultures, personalities and motivations.

Players need to make sure they will be able to perform well and respond to the environment they choose to work in.

So make sure you are happy with the environment you are going to be working in and most important the people you will be working with.

## 04 Quality of the Rugby Program

Similar to the above, not all rugby development programs or academies are of the same standard although in New Zealand there is a strong cross sharing of information and resources facilitated by the NZRU that ensures all of our academies have access to the tools they require to development elite players.

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Critical to a successful program is the quality of the coaches, management and players involved.

So it almost goes without saying that you need to be confident that the rugby program you are joining will provide the qualities you need to develop and be as good as you can be. Of course a lot of that is up to you!

## 05 Player Pathway

This is a difficult one as you never really know when the next opportunity will come along in professional sport and especially rugby. However in considering any contract or academy program a player needs to be able to understand how, as a result of taking that opportunity up, it will help him become a successful professional rugby player, how it will help him fulfil his potential. The player needs to understand that by committing to this contract he will be provided with the opportunities and the support, guidance and advice to take advantage of these opportunities – he can see his pathway to success.

## 06 Time Commitment / Workload

As covered above all rugby environments are different and as such they have different expectations on a player's time commitments and workloads.

Players need a clear understanding of the kind of workload they will be working under and the time commitments that will be required of them.

Make sure you will have enough time and energy to continue with your off field education / study or work albeit maybe not at the same speed.

## 07 Grass is not always greener

The grass is not always greener. Sometimes the temptation is to try something else, especially if the amount of money on offer is substantially better. Be careful of this – if you are part of a good rugby program that is helping you develop well and you are happy with all of the above points then be very careful about changing, especially at the developmental stages of your career. It could be a big mistake for you to walk away from an existing academy program or rugby environment that is really working for you only to find out you do not like the new one you have joined and your development and / or rugby suffers because of it just because the new one had more money on offer.

## 08 International Eligibility

International Eligibility covers what requirements you need to meet to be eligible to play for a country.

A player is eligible to play for the country where:

- He was born
- A parent or grandparent was born; or
- He has completed 36 months of residence immediately preceding the time of playing.

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It is crucial to realise that once you have played for the senior 15-a-side (i.e. All Blacks, Samoa), next senior 15-a-side, or National Sevens Team of a country you cannot play for another country.

It is important to take this factor into account in considering any contract but most importantly before you play for any national team. If you are not sure call the NZRPA on **0800 PLAYER** before you get named in a national squad.

## 09 Contractual Terms

If you are comfortable with all the above then you can give consideration to the contractual terms of the academy, development or playing contract on offer.

We say this because if any of the above turns out to be not to your liking they can have an extremely damaging effect on your rugby and personal development. No amount of money can justify taking up a contract at the early stages of your rugby career if you do not have a good support network, the opportunity to develop holistically, a work environment that suits you, a quality rugby development program and time commitments that are reasonable.

Missing out on \$5,000 - \$15,000 - \$25,000 and even more at the early stages of a player's career is not that material if it means he gets to stay in the environment and program that will allow a player to become a successful professional rugby player and attain a full time professional rugby playing contract that will see the player earning potentially well in excess of \$100,000 annually for 5-6 years all going well.

Having said that a player needs to make sure that their retainer is fair and reasonable and that the length of contract they sign is appropriate – getting this balance right is a skill. It is important for example that a young academy player can make ends meet financially while meeting their rugby commitments. Careful budgeting and planning is important in this area. Once again contacting the NZRPA will allow them to provide you with support in ensuring this.

## 10 Overseas Contracts

If the contract you are considering is an overseas contract there are a number of specific matters that you need to consider including foreign exchange, taxation, residency, work permits and eligibility that are important.

You will require independent advice in considering an overseas contract. You should contact the NZRPA on 0800 PLAYER who will help you access this advice.

## 11 Access of market knowledge and independent advice

This is where you should contact the NZRPA on **0800 PLAYER** and / or visit the website [www.nzrpa.co.nz](http://www.nzrpa.co.nz)

The NZRPA will help you understand the contacting structure and market in New Zealand. The NZRPA will also help you access independent advice.