

NEW ZEALAND RUGBY PLAYERS ASSOCIATION (RPA)
RETIRED PLAYERS SURVEY SUMMARY 2026

RPA | THE RUGBYCLUB
NEW ZEALAND RUGBY PLAYERS ASSOCIATION



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THE PURPOSE

We conducted this survey to better understand the lived experiences of New Zealand's retired professional rugby players. Specifically, we wanted to learn about their career journeys, including how and why their playing careers ended, their experiences transitioning out of professional rugby, the challenges they faced and what helped them navigate this period of change.

We explored whether preparation during their playing years, such as gaining qualifications, financial planning or accessing support, influenced their experiences after rugby. We also sought to understand how players are faring today across employment, financial security, wellbeing, physical health, relationships and identity, alongside any ongoing challenges. Finally, we gathered feedback on awareness of RPA services and what would add meaningful value to transitioning and retired players going forward.

The survey included a mix of multiple-choice and open-response questions. It was distributed on 16 December 2025 through WhatsApp groups and the retired player email database, with all responses collected anonymously.

This report has been prepared for strategic planning purposes. It brings together the key themes and insights from the survey, presenting findings in aggregate and highlighting opportunities to strengthen the support and services available to retired players.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



THANK YOU

We extend our sincere thanks to the 282 retired professional rugby players who generously shared their experiences with us. Your honesty, insights and willingness to reflect on your own journeys are incredibly valuable. By sharing what you have learned, you are helping us better understand the challenges and opportunities that come with life beyond rugby, and importantly, empowering current players to make more informed choices, invest their time with intention and take greater ownership of their futures. Your generosity will have a lasting impact, helping us strengthen the support we provide and better equip the next generation of players for life during and beyond their professional playing careers.



RPA | THE RUGBYCLUB
NEW ZEALAND RUGBY PLAYERS ASSOCIATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RPA RETIRED PLAYER SURVEY SUMMARY | 282 RESPONDENTS

This report draws on the experiences of 282 retired professional rugby players, providing valuable insights into how players navigate the transition from professional rugby into life beyond the game. The findings provide an important evidence base to inform how we prepare, empower and support players throughout their playing careers and beyond.

Encouragingly, the findings show that most retired players are doing well. Overall, 77% report that life after rugby is going really well or okay, reflecting the resilience, capability and adaptability developed through their experiences in professional rugby.

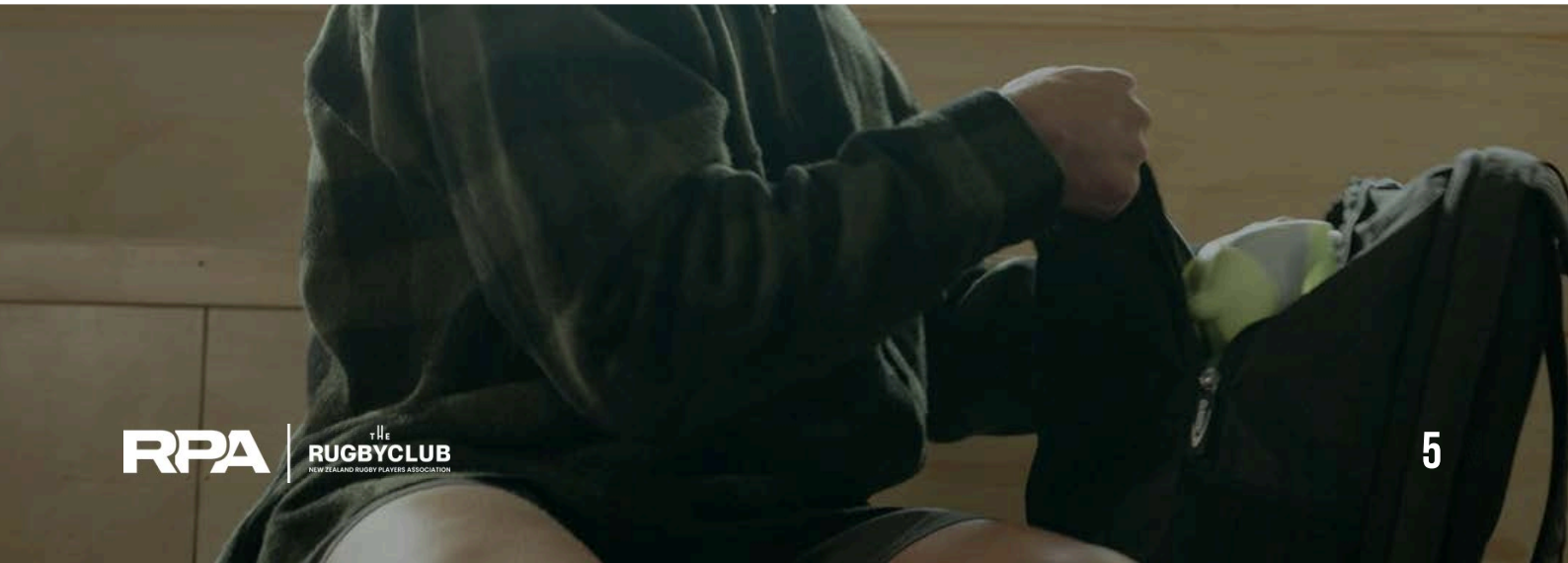
However, the findings also reinforce a fundamental reality of professional rugby: players cannot always control when or how their careers end. While around a third of respondents described their retirement as planned, many left the game due to injury or the cumulative physical demands of the sport. Regardless of how long a player spends in the professional game, the timing and circumstances of their exit are not always within their control.

This uncertainty has a significant bearing on the transition experience. The findings suggest that the first 18 months following retirement are particularly challenging, as players navigate new career pathways, adjust to different financial circumstances and rebuild the structure, purpose and connections that professional rugby has provided. This financial adjustment is reflected in the data, with 73% of respondents reporting annual earnings below $90,000 during their first two years after retirement.

Across the dataset, several factors consistently emerge as contributing to more positive experiences after rugby. Education and qualifications, financial preparation, proactive planning and strong networks are all associated with smoother transitions and greater confidence in navigating life beyond the game. Of the 63% of respondents who completed a formal qualification, 95% reported that it helped equip them for life after rugby or opened new pathways, reinforcing the value of building skills, connections and options while still playing.

The survey also highlights a strong appetite among retired players for continued learning, connection and support, particularly in career development, brain health education and relationship resources. These findings reinforce that personal development and support do not end when a playing career does, and identify valuable opportunities to strengthen the services available throughout the player lifecycle.

TAKEN TOGETHER, THE FINDINGS REINFORCE A POWERFUL MESSAGE: WHILE PLAYERS CANNOT ALWAYS CONTROL WHEN THEIR RUGBY CAREERS END, THEY CAN TAKE OWNERSHIP OF HOW THEY PREPARE FOR WHAT COMES NEXT. THE OPPORTUNITIES THEY PURSUE, THE SKILLS THEY DEVELOP, AND THE CHOICES THEY MAKE DURING THEIR PLAYING YEARS CAN SHAPE THEIR FUTURES LONG AFTER THE FINAL WHISTLE.



THE PLAYING YEARS



This section provides a snapshot of the respondents' professional playing careers, including the level they competed at, career length, retirement timing, and the factors that shaped their exit from the game.

1. FORM OF RUGBY PLAYED

Of the 282 respondents, 98% played men's professional rugby and 2% played women's professional rugby.

2. TIME SINCE RETIREMENT

The majority of respondents (70%) retired from professional rugby more than five years ago, providing valuable insight into longer-term experiences and outcomes. Of the remaining respondents, 15% retired three to five years ago, 10% within the past 18 months to three years, and 6% within the past 18 months.

3. PROFESSIONAL CAREER LENGTH

The respondent group was characterised by long professional careers, with 67% playing for eight years or more, and 35% sustaining careers of 12 or more years. Shorter careers of one to three years accounted for 9% of respondents.

4. WHERE PROFESSIONAL RUGBY CAREERS CONCLUDED

More than half of respondents (59%) played their final professional game overseas, compared with 41% who finished their careers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

5. AGE AT RETIREMENT

More than half of respondents (52%) retired between the ages of 32 and 36, with a further 10% retiring at 37 or older. Of the remaining respondents, 22% retired between 29 and 31, 13% between 25 and 28, and 3% at age 24 or younger. Overall, the findings highlight that most respondents sustained professional playing careers into their 30s.

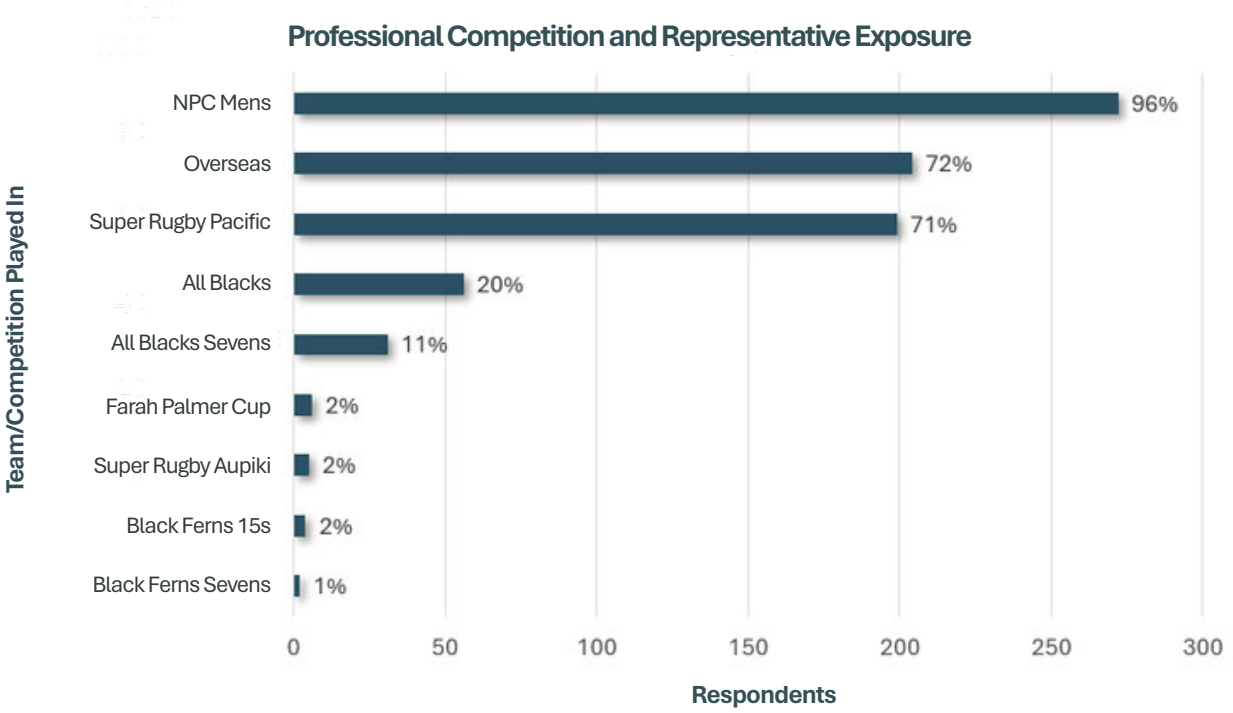
38% OF PLAYERS HAD RETIRED BY AGE 31

9 in 10 PLAYERS RETIRED BY AGE 37



6. PROFESSIONAL COMPETITION AND REPRESENTATIVE EXPOSURE

Respondents bring a wealth of professional rugby experience across domestic, international and overseas competitions. The vast majority (96%) played NPC, 71% competed in Super Rugby and 72% spent part of their careers playing overseas. One in five respondents also represented the All Blacks.



7. REASONS FOR RETIREMENT

For many players, retirement was shaped by circumstances beyond their control. Injury and the cumulative physical demands of the game accounted for 41% of career endings, with non-selection contributing a further 10%. In comparison, 33% of respondents described their retirement as planned.

These findings highlight that while some players retire on their own terms, many leave the game due to circumstances beyond their control. Respondents' comments also reveal that retirement is rarely a single, clear-cut decision. Instead, it is often shaped by a combination of factors. These include push factors, such as physical decline, contract uncertainty and non-selection, alongside pull factors, including family priorities, greater stability and opportunities beyond rugby.

As one respondent shared, "Planned retirement/body couldn't cope. Tend to go hand-in-hand." Another reflected, "The uncertain lifestyle became tiresome - I wanted more stability in where I lived and was ready for a new challenge." Others described being ready to pursue new opportunities, including one who shared, "It was time to start pursuing a business career and chasing our kids around!" Four respondents also identified COVID-related disruption, including cancelled seasons, reduced contracts and club instability, as factors influencing their retirement.

TOGETHER, THESE EXPERIENCES REINFORCE THAT RETIREMENT IS RARELY DEFINED BY A SINGLE EVENT. RATHER, IT IS OFTEN THE RESULT OF CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES, PRIORITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES, HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARING PLAYERS FOR A TRANSITION THAT MAY NOT HAPPEN WHEN OR HOW THEY EXPECT.

TRANSITION INSIGHTS



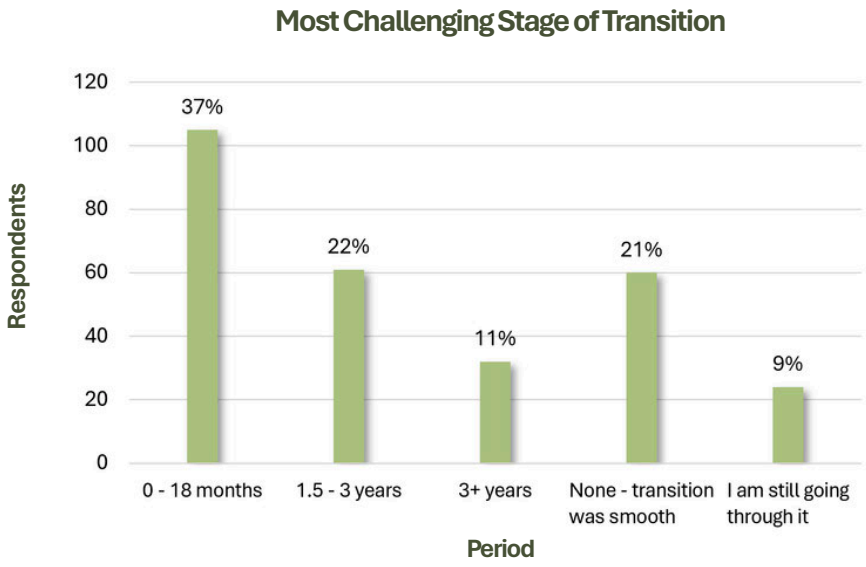
This section explores the lived experience of transitioning out of professional rugby, including when it felt most challenging, the pressures players faced, their perceived level of preparedness, and how life is tracking now.

While each journey is unique, clear patterns emerge around early adjustment, financial reset, identity shift, and the search for structure and purpose beyond the game. Together, these insights help us better understand both the pressure points and the protective factors that shape life after rugby.

8. MOST CHALLENGING STAGE OF TRANSITION

The first 18 months following retirement emerged as the most challenging period, identified by 37% of respondents. A further 22% found the period between 18 months and three years most difficult, while 11% identified challenges extending beyond three years.

These findings highlight that adjusting to life beyond professional rugby can take several years. Encouragingly, 21% described their transition as smooth, while 9% reported that they are still navigating the process.



1 in 3

PLAYERS FOUND THE PERIOD BEYOND 18 MONTHS AFTER RETIREMENT THE MOST CHALLENGING



9. KEY TRANSITION CHALLENGES

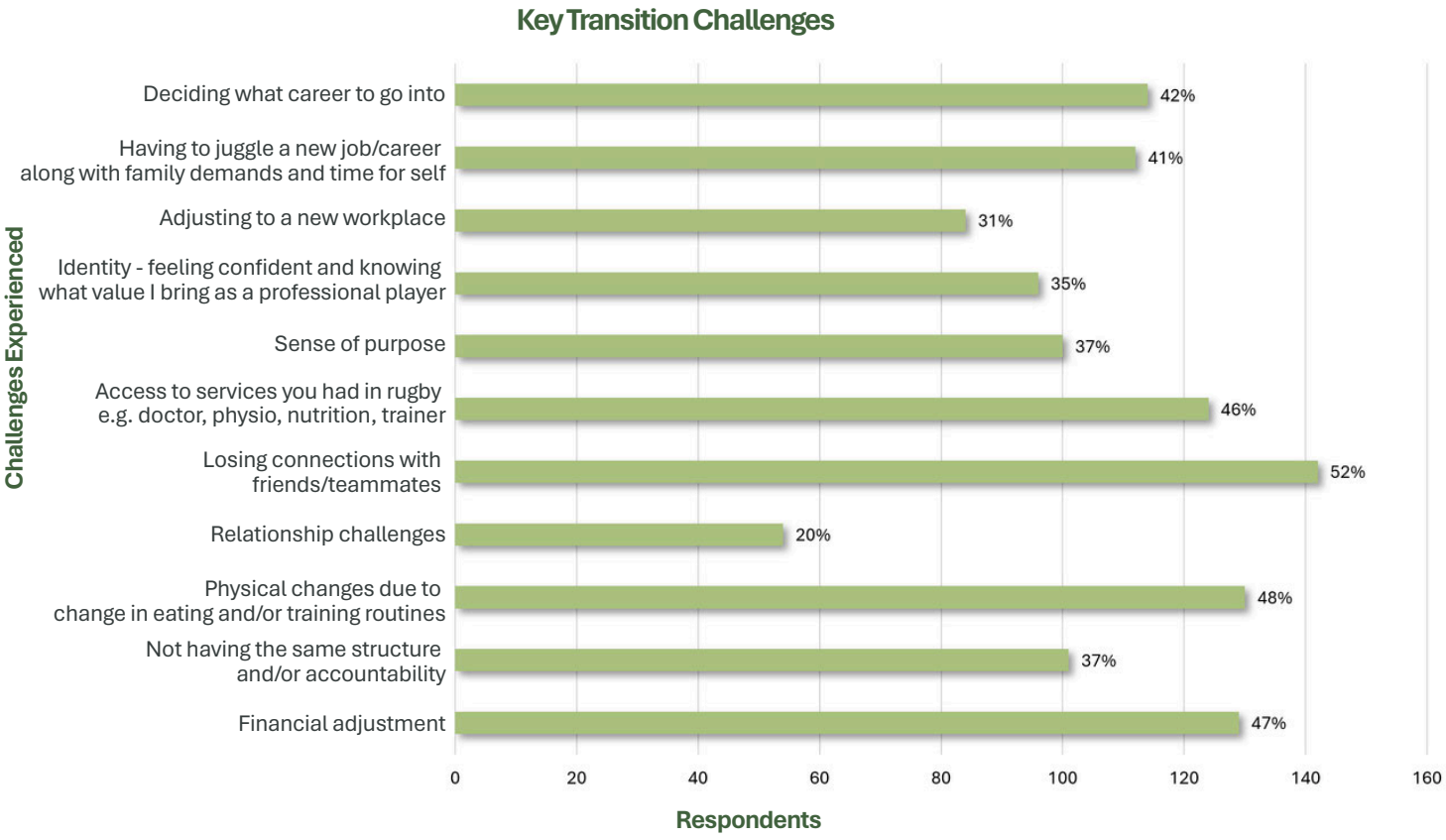
We asked respondents to identify the key challenges they experienced when transitioning out of professional rugby. Players could select multiple responses, recognising that these challenges often overlap. The findings highlight that transitioning out of professional rugby involves both practical adjustments and significant changes to players' sense of connection, identity and purpose.

The most commonly reported challenge was losing connection with teammates (52%), followed by adjusting to physical changes and different training routines (48%), financial adjustment (47%) and losing access to rugby-based services, including medical and performance support (46%). Career uncertainty was identified by 42% of respondents, while 41% reported challenges balancing new work and family demands. A further 37% highlighted the loss of structure and accountability previously provided by professional rugby.

Beyond these practical challenges, the findings highlight a deeper personal adjustment. More than a third of respondents (37%) struggled to find a sense of purpose beyond rugby, while 35% questioned the value they could bring outside the game.

> WHEN YOU FINISH PLAYING YOU HAVE ALL THESE SKILLS THAT YOU HAVE REFINED OVER YOUR CAREER, E.G. GOAL KICKING, AND WHEN YOU RETIRE, THE NEXT DAY THEY ARE REDUNDANT. THIS IS QUITE A STRANGE FEELING.
>
> - SURVEY RESPONDENT

The findings highlight a unique challenge of transitioning out of professional rugby: the loss of an environment where players have developed a high level of mastery, a clear role and a strong sense of purpose.

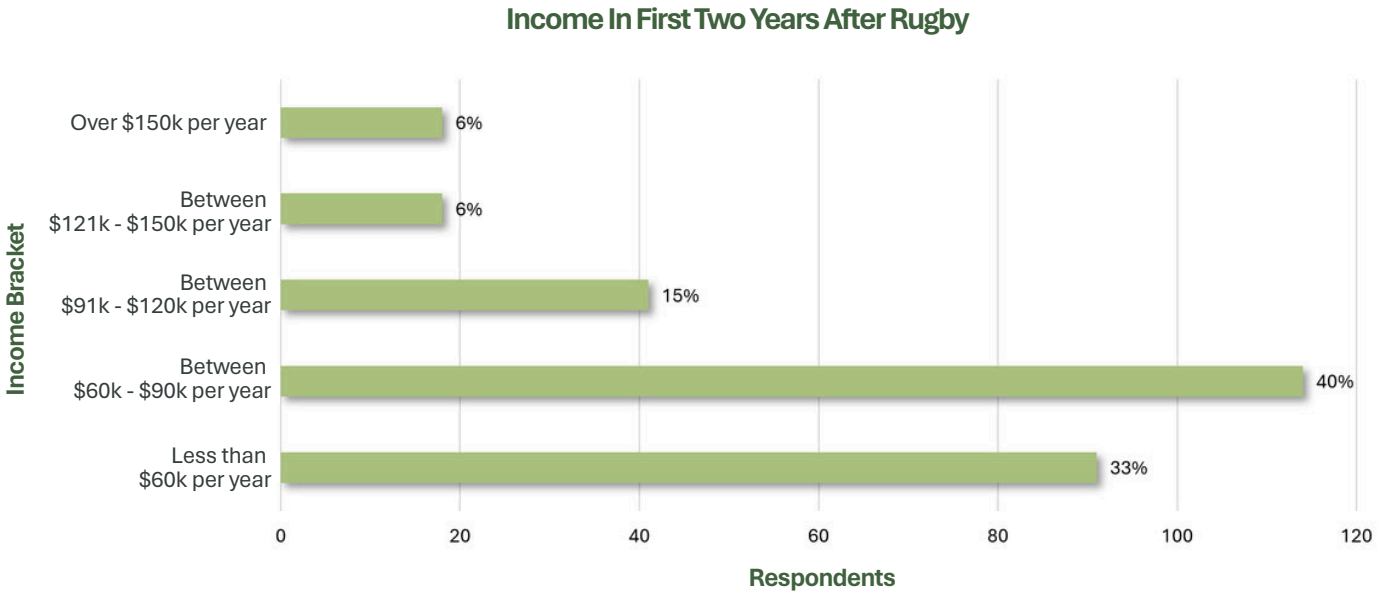


10. FINANCIAL BUFFER AT RETIREMENT

Of the 282 respondents, 64% reported having a financial buffer or fund in place to support them through transition, while 36% did not.

11. INCOME IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS AFTER RUGBY

The findings highlight a significant financial adjustment following retirement, with nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) earning less than $90,000 annually during their first two years after professional rugby. Relatively few reported higher incomes during this period, reinforcing the importance of saving and preparing financially for the transition while still playing.



12. COMPLETION OF FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS

Of the 282 respondents, 63% completed a formal qualification such as a tertiary degree or trade certificate before, or during, their professional rugby career, while 37% did not undertake a formal qualification during that time.



TRANSITION INSIGHTS

13. IMPACT OF QUALIFICATIONS ON POST-RUGBY PATHWAYS

Of those who completed a formal qualification before or during their professional career, 95% believed it helped equip them for, or opened pathways into, life after rugby.

95% OF PLAYERS SAID THEIR FORMAL QUALIFICATION HELPED PREPARE THEM FOR LIFE BEYOND RUGBY AND OPENED NEW CAREER PATHWAYS.

14. PERCEIVED PREPAREDNESS FOR LIFE AFTER RUGBY

The findings highlight significant gaps in players' perceived readiness for life beyond rugby. Less than 1 in 5 players (17%) reported feeling fully prepared, while 35% felt mostly prepared but identified some gaps, and a further 34% described themselves as somewhat prepared. Another 14% reported feeling completely unprepared. Overall, while most players entered retirement with some level of preparation, relatively few felt fully equipped and confident to navigate life beyond the game.

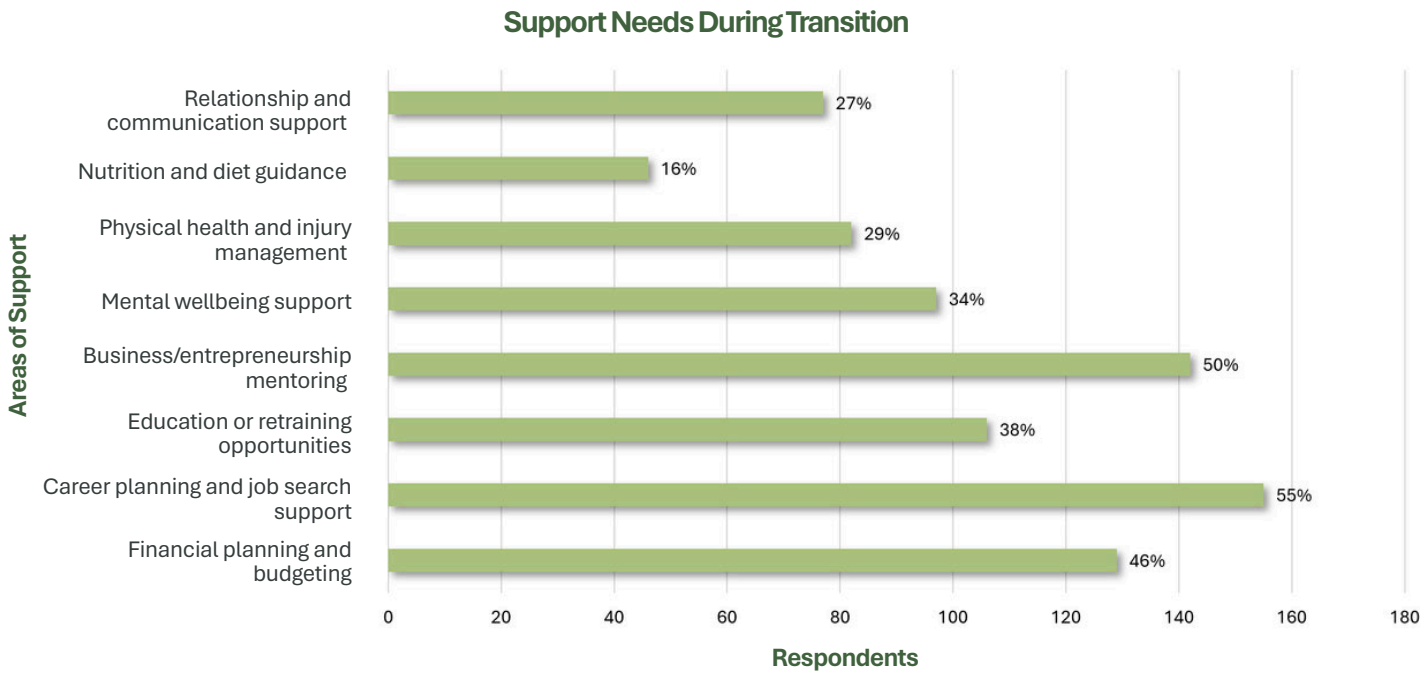


15. SUPPORT NEEDS DURING TRANSITION

To better understand how players could have been supported through their transition, we asked respondents to identify the areas of support they would have found most valuable. Players could select multiple options to reflect the range of challenges and needs experienced during this period.

Career planning and job search support emerged as the most valued area (55%), closely followed by business and entrepreneurship mentoring (50%). Financial planning support was identified by 46% of respondents, while 38% highlighted education or retraining opportunities. Mental wellbeing support was selected by 34%, physical health support by 29% and relationship support by 27%.

Together, these findings highlight the importance of a holistic approach to transition support that extends well beyond employment. Players benefit from access to opportunities, guidance and support across their careers, finances, health, wellbeing and relationships.





TRANSITION INSIGHTS

Respondents also had the opportunity to share additional thoughts through an optional comment field. Their reflections provide valuable insight into their transition experiences, highlighting common challenges and the support that could have made a meaningful difference.

MENTORSHIP AND CONNECTION

Players expressed a desire for mentorship from former players and opportunities to maintain connections with others who understand their experiences.

"Mentorship of a general nature from older players..."
"Anything to assist with the changes... a network... to know you're doing okay."
"Reconnecting with other players once you get back from overseas."

IDENTITY AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Several respondents highlighted the emotional impact of retirement, particularly when careers ended unexpectedly or through injury.

"Needed counselling which I did not receive to deal with loss of career and identity."
"Nothing can prepare you for the jump."

CONTINUED ACCESS TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT

The loss of access to services previously provided through professional rugby was another concern, particularly when adjusting to reduced income.

"Support for hauora based things i.e. gym membership (huge cost once retired and low-income)."

STRUCTURED PLANNING AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Players highlighted the value of practical transition planning that also considers the needs of their families.

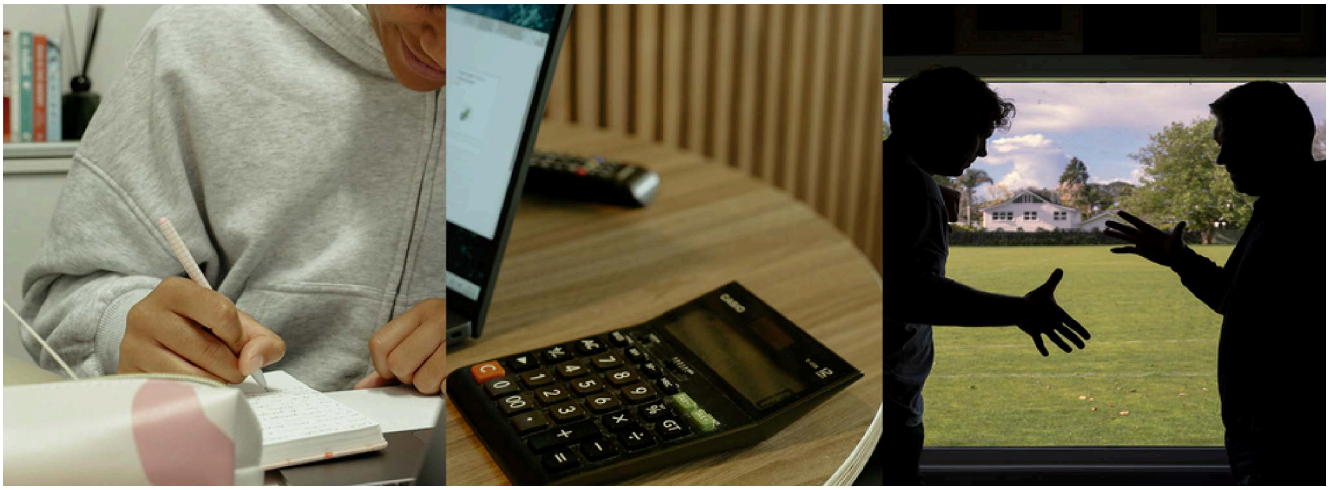
> IT WOULD BE GOOD TO HAVE A STRATEGY SESSION TO HELP PREPARE FOR RETIREMENT AND PUT A PLAN IN PLACE, WITH WIVES OR PARTNERS INCLUDED.
>
> - SURVEY RESPONDENT

TOGETHER, THESE REFLECTIONS HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT THAT EXTENDS BEYOND EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL PREPARATION. PLAYERS VALUE CONTINUED CONNECTION, TRUSTED GUIDANCE, SUPPORT FOR THEIR WELLBEING AND A CLEAR PLAN FOR NAVIGATING LIFE BEYOND RUGBY.

16. WHAT HELPED MOST IN PREPARING FOR LIFE BEYOND RUGBY

We asked retired players to reflect on what helped them most in preparing for life beyond professional rugby. The 190 responses provide valuable firsthand insight into the decisions, actions and opportunities that made a meaningful difference to their transition.

Four clear themes emerged: education and qualifications, financial preparation, making intentional use of playing years, and building networks and connections. Together, they highlight the significant influence players can have over their futures while still in the professional game.



EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

Education and qualifications emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent themes. Many respondents identified completing a degree, trade qualification or apprenticeship, or undertaking further study, as among the most valuable steps they took to prepare for life beyond rugby.

One respondent captured the value of preparing for two futures at once:

> THE MOST HELPFUL THING I DID WAS LOCK IN A PLAN B (UNI DEGREE) WHILE STILL PLAYING (PLAN A).
>
> - SURVEY RESPONDENT

Others were equally direct:

"The best thing I did was to get a trade."
"Having a qualification to fall back on."

TRANSITION INSIGHTS

FINANCIAL PREPARATION AND SECURITY

Saving, investing and building financial security were also consistently identified as important contributors to a more positive transition. Respondents highlighted the value of investing their rugby earnings, purchasing property and establishing savings that provided greater financial freedom when their playing income ended. This is particularly significant given that 33% of respondents reported earning less than $60,000 annually during their first two years after retirement.

Respondents reflected on the value of the financial decisions they made while playing:

“Invest my rugby money in a family house (no. 1 thing that has set me up), plus get some back up career qualifications and experience.”

> **HAVING A FINANCIAL BUFFER MEANT I WASN'T UNDER PRESSURE STRAIGHT AWAY. IT GAVE ME BREATHING SPACE TO ADJUST TO LIFE AFTER RUGBY AND BE MORE SELECTIVE ABOUT WHAT I WANTED TO DO NEXT.**
>
> **- SURVEY RESPONDENT**

MAKING THE MOST OF PLAYING YEARS

Another strong theme was the importance of starting early and making intentional use of the time and opportunities available during a professional playing career. Respondents described the value of studying, exploring career interests, gaining work experience and actively preparing for their next chapter, rather than waiting until retirement was approaching.

“Use my time while still playing to work on my next chapter.”

NETWORKS, RELATIONSHIPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The value of building relationships and seeking advice from others also featured prominently. Respondents highlighted how conversations, mentorship and professional connections helped them explore opportunities, build confidence and establish pathways into new careers.

“Talk to people who had been there before me.”

One respondent shared a particularly powerful example of how support from the RPA helped create opportunities beyond the game:

“I contacted the RPA who introduced me to people in Westpac who were sponsors. This was a catalyst for a lot of other introductions that helped me secure a role in banking.”

The consistency of these themes is compelling. While every player's journey is different, those who identified positive steps in preparing for retirement repeatedly pointed to actions taken during their playing years.

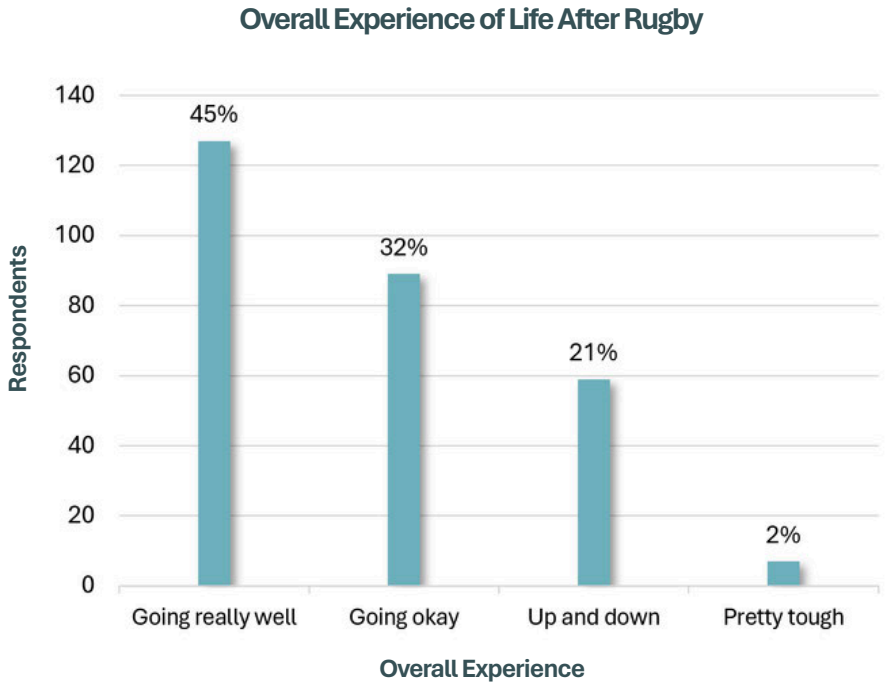
QUALIFICATIONS CREATE OPTIONS. FINANCIAL PREPARATION CREATES SECURITY. NETWORKS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES. MAKING INTENTIONAL USE OF TIME DURING A PROFESSIONAL RUGBY CAREER GIVES PLAYERS GREATER OWNERSHIP OF THEIR FUTURES AND CONFIDENCE IN WHAT COMES NEXT.

LIFE BEYOND THE JERSEY

Drawing on the experiences of 282 retired professional rugby players, this section explores what life beyond the game really looks like, from finding new career pathways and purpose to navigating changes in physical health, mental wellbeing, relationships and identity. While most retired players reported that life was going well or okay, others described facing real challenges, including financial pressures, ongoing health concerns, loss of connection and finding their feet outside the professional rugby environment.

17. OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF LIFE AFTER RUGBY

Of the 282 retired players surveyed, 45% said life after rugby is going really well, while 32% said it is going okay. Another 21% said life has been up and down, with 2% finding it pretty tough. Overall, 77% are doing well or okay, while almost one in four are still finding some parts of life after rugby challenging.



45%

OF RETIRED PLAYERS SAY LIFE AFTER RUGBY IS GOING REALLY WELL

18. CAREER DIRECTION AND SUPPORT

Of the 282 retired players surveyed, 39% are thinking about changing jobs or careers in the next 12 to 18 months. Of these, 29% said support connecting them with new opportunities would be useful. While 61% aren't currently considering a change, 42% recognised the value of career support for other players navigating life after rugby.

19. INTEREST IN BRAIN HEALTH EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

Of the 282 retired players surveyed, 78% want to learn more about brain health, the support available and what they can do to look after their brain health in the long term. The remaining 22% feel they already have the information they need. Overall, the results show a strong interest in understanding brain health and taking practical steps to protect it.

20. INTEREST IN RELATIONSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SUPPORT

Of the 282 respondents, 83% said that resources or guidance around relationships and communication would be helpful for players, while 17% said such resources or guidance would not be helpful. The strong majority response suggests a clear appetite for practical support to help navigate relationship dynamics beyond the playing environment.

21. UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE

We asked retired players: "What is one thing you wish someone understood about your experience after rugby?"

A total of 147 respondents provided written comments. Their reflections were wide-ranging, deeply personal, and at times raw. The key themes emerging from those responses are captured below. While experiences varied, several clear and consistent themes emerged.

IDENTITY AND FINDING PURPOSE

For many, retirement meant more than leaving a job. It meant adjusting to life without the identity, structure and sense of purpose that rugby had provided.

"Finishing rugby is like a death in the family."
"Life after rugby isn't just about switching careers, it's about finding yourself again."
"The mental struggle of finding out where you fit in the world."

Players also spoke about missing the routine and accountability of professional rugby.

"I missed structure and being told where to be."
"One day you have structure and are accountable... it's a lot harder to try to build that same connection in the workplace."

LOSING CONNECTION AND FEELING ISOLATED

The loss of daily connection with teammates was a common experience. Some players described feeling isolated, forgotten or no longer valued once their playing careers ended.

"It's lonely."
"You go from having 30 mates you spend all day with to being isolated in your career."
"You can feel forgotten."
"Once you are injured you are no longer a valuable asset."

MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Players spoke openly about the emotional challenges of retirement, including the ups and downs of adjusting to a different life.

"Rollercoaster of emotions."
"Mental health has deteriorated over these years."
"It's harder than it looks."

THE PHYSICAL COST OF RUGBY

For some, the physical impact of professional rugby continues long after retirement, with ongoing pain and injuries affecting everyday life.

"That we put our bodies through hell."
"The chronic pain that remains long after the 'hits' are gone."
"These injuries and surgeries affect my day to day life."



LIFE BEYOND THE JERSEY



STARTING AGAIN

Many players described the challenge of starting over in a new career or workplace, often without the confidence, experience or sense of belonging they had developed in rugby.

"That it's quite a challenge and to feel like you are restarting your life."
"You are just another pawn in life's game of chess."
"Imposter syndrome."
"Self-doubt was a massive barrier."

THE VALUE OF PREPARATION AND MENTORSHIP

Players reflected on the importance of making the most of their playing years, building skills, exploring opportunities and connecting with people who could guide them through the next chapter.

"Get educated and plan for life after rugby."
"The planning you do during your rugby career directly affects the transition."
"That most players are restarting their lives in the workforce and need mentors prior to finishing."
"Use the time and resource available while playing - it all goes once we decide to finish."

FINDING YOUR FEET TAKES TIME

Players recognised that adjusting to life after rugby takes time. While some experienced difficult periods, others shared messages of perspective, gratitude and growth.

"It takes time."
"Expect that you will go through some tough time(s) when retired but it will be okay."
"It will get easier."
"Rugby isn't everything."

Others reflected positively on the skills, relationships and opportunities rugby had given them.

"Your rugby journey provides amazing skills for life outside of rugby."
"How grateful I am to the rugby support network."
"There are decades of life after rugby where I can contribute to others."



22. ADVICE FROM THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN THERE

We asked retired players: “What would be your best advice for a current player who has yet to retire?”

Their advice was practical, honest and remarkably consistent. Drawing on their own experiences, retired players shared what they wish they'd known, what made a difference, and what they'd encourage current players to do while they're still in the game.

START PREPARING EARLY

The strongest message was simple: don't wait until your rugby career ends to start thinking about what comes next. Many players reflected on how quickly retirement can arrive, often sooner than expected.

“Don’t wait till you’re retired to plan for retirement.”
“Have a plan b, you never know when your career is over.”
“Build those foundations before life after rugby slaps you in the face and you’re not ready.”
“Prepare, its shorter than you think.”
“Your rugby career could be over in a split second.”

GET QUALIFIED AND KEEP LEARNING

Education, qualifications and practical skills were repeatedly highlighted as ways to create more options beyond rugby.

“Get a qualification before you finish.”
“Get a trade or a formal qualification to give you options.”
“Study. Be inquisitive.”

Players also recognised that balancing rugby, study and family commitments isn't always easy.

“It’s hard the juggle is real with a young whānau, but post rugby is harder if you’re not prepared.”

BE SMART WITH YOUR MONEY

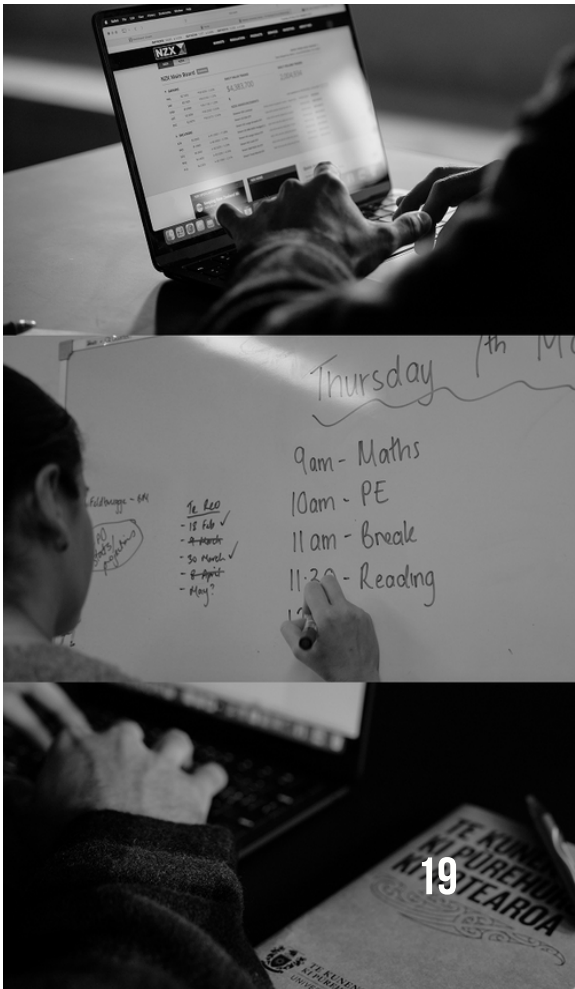
Saving, investing and building financial security were common themes. Players encouraged others to make the most of their earning years and prepare for the possibility of a lower income after rugby.

“Be wise with your money. Invest it.”
“Build a strong financial base.”
“Prepare for lean income years.”
“Financial literacy would be a massive piece of preparation.”

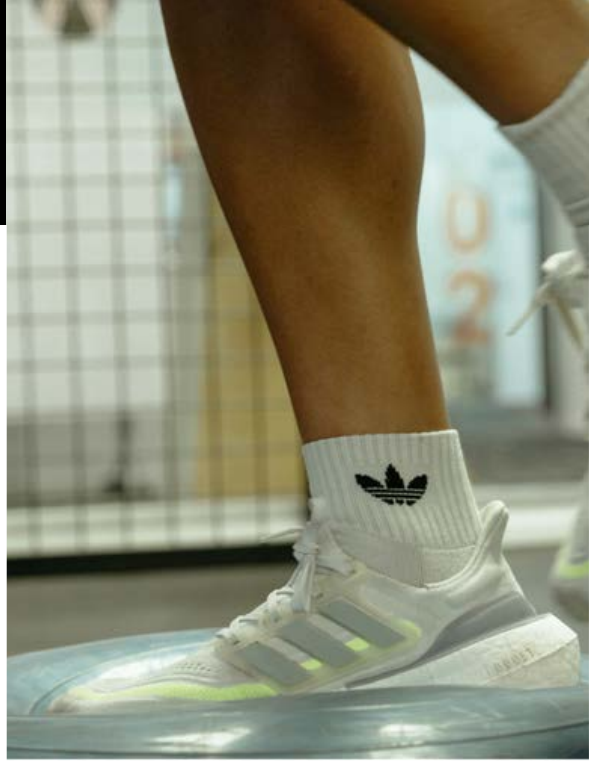
BUILD YOUR NETWORKS

Retired players emphasised the value of building genuine relationships and making connections while still playing. Many recognised that rugby opens doors, but those opportunities can be harder to access once their playing careers end.

“Use your network to gain as many connections as possible.”
“Make genuine connections with sponsors.”
“Talk to as many people as you can as there's some good buggers out there that are keen to help.”



LIFE BEYOND THE JERSEY



LOOK AFTER YOUR BODY AND MIND

Players encouraged others to think beyond their immediate playing careers and take care of their long-term physical and mental wellbeing.

"Look after your body, you only get one."
"Look after your head/brain."
"Prepare your mind for the change."
"You will face more mental challenges than you ever thought about."

BACK YOURSELF THROUGH THE CHANGE

Retired players were open about the challenges of leaving professional rugby, but also offered reassurance that difficult periods can pass and new opportunities can emerge.

"Walking away is tough but it has to happen."
"Expect a down period of finding your feet and purpose."
"Be confident that your best years are still ahead of you."
"It's not as scary as you think it will be if you ask for help."
"Be willing to take a step back to be able to take two steps forward."

YOU'RE MORE THAN A RUGBY PLAYER

A strong message was the importance of developing interests, relationships and a sense of identity beyond rugby.

"You play rugby you are not a rugby player."
"Enjoy your time, but remember you are more than just a rugby player."
"Don't be just a rugby player.... make yourself interesting."
"Follow your interests outside of rugby. Be curious of all industries. Learn from others. Rugby is just one part of our life not the end. There are limitless opportunities everywhere you just need to look for them. The competitiveness can be transferred to all industries."

TAKE YOUR RUGBY SKILLS WITH YOU

Players recognised that the experiences, knowledge, skills and habits they developed through professional rugby have real value beyond the game.

"Use the tools learned as a player."
"Study. Be inquisitive. Focus on skills you can translate from sport."
"Learn your new job with the passion you put into rugby."
"The skills you learn in rugby are transferable to any job."

Across the responses, the advice to current players was consistent: make the most of your playing years, prepare early, explore your options and back yourself. Rugby can be an amazing part of your life, but there's so much more to look forward to when you hang up your boots.

The skills and strengths you've mastered through your years playing rugby don't disappear when your career ends. You can harness them to shape a new chapter of life that's every bit as fulfilling, successful and purposeful, whatever that looks like for you.



CONCLUSION

The findings are encouraging, with 77% of retired players reporting that life beyond rugby is going well or okay. However, only 17% felt fully prepared for retirement, with many facing challenges around finances, physical health, identity, purpose and connection. For one in three, the most challenging period came more than 18 months after retirement.

Education, financial preparation, career planning and strong networks consistently emerged as valuable foundations for life beyond rugby. The findings also highlight the importance of ongoing support as players' needs evolve.

The greatest opportunity is to learn from those who have been there. Their experiences provide valuable lessons for current players and insights to strengthen existing programmes and services. By sharing this knowledge, we can empower players to make the most of their playing years, take ownership of their futures and continue to grow, pursue their ambitions and make the most of the opportunities ahead.

AUTHORSHIP

This survey summary was prepared by the New Zealand Rugby Players' Association (RPA).

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