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THE STORY OF
THE FIRST WOMEN'S RUGBY WORLD CUP

FOREWORD BY SARAH HUNTER



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MARTYN THOMAS

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The pioneering Cardiff Ladies team pose for the camera ahead of their match against Newport in 1917, captain E. Kirton proudly clutching the match ball. The triumphant USA would retrace their steps 74 years later. Cardiff Rugby Museum

Sue Dorrington (far left) and Mary Forsyth (second from right) pictured ahead of England's match against Sweden in October 1988. Forsyth won her sole international cap in the 40-0 win.

Forsyth receives her original England cap from WRFU secretary, Rosie Golby.

Sue Dorrington prepares to throw into a lineout for England. Brian Moore helped Dorrington with aspects of her game, including throwing, leading into the World Cup.

Mary Forsyth poses for a photo with newborn baby Kathryn, under the watchful gaze of her mother, Clementine.

A flag bearing the Women's Rugby World Cup logo flutters in the wind during the opening ceremony. The logo had been approved by the IRFB only weeks before the tournament. Getty

Liza Burgess holds the Welsh flag as she leads her team-mates into the courtyard at County Hall. She would later take to the stage alongside Amanda Bennet (second left). Getty

The Italian squad line up behind captain Mafalda Palla at the World Cup opening ceremony at Cardiff's County Hall.

The Italians, in their eye-catching turquoise tracksuits, take part in the parade around the National Stadium pitch at half-time of the Schweppes Cup semi-finals.

The World Cup's commercial manager Sue Dorrington pictured in action for England against Italy. She was determined to win the tournament she had helped organise.

England captain Karen Almond makes a break through the Italian defence. The fly-half was widely considered to be one of the best players in the world at the time. Getty

Italy turned heads for their style on and off the pitch in South Wales. Here players pose for a photo at the Cardiff Institute of Higher Education.

Another late night for Alice Cooper as she types up teamsheets in the bunker.

Having eventually found Llanharan's Dairy Field, Alice Cooper conducts media interviews on the touchline. Copyright, 1991, Dawn Cooper, All Rights Reserved

A USSR player runs with the ball against the USA. It was a mismatch on the pitch but the American players happily bought Soviet trinkets to help their opponents with their off-field problems. Getty

Wales take on the mighty New Zealand. Despite acquitting themselves well, they had no answer to the Women's All Blacks' attacking prowess. Getty

Head of press Alice Cooper talks to media at the Arms Park.

Alice Cooper stands on the Arms Park pitch as she gives another television interview.

Debbie Chase leads the Haka ahead of the semi-final against the USA. The American players did not face the ritual, remaining in their huddle chanting 'Harder, Stronger, Faster'. Getty

New Zealand's Anna Richards attempts to evade a tackle during her side's bruising semi-final defeat to the USA. Getty

Ahead of their historic victory against France in the semi-finals, England gathered for a team shot under the floodlights.

Alice Cooper in action for a side made up of the organisers/volunteers, who played against the USSR on the eve of the final. In the background is Laurie O'Reilly, who refereed the match. Getty

Sue Dorrington was attracted to the tournament's antique silver trophy by its ornate lace detailing, something that made drinking from it difficult. Getty

England pose for a squad photo ahead of the inaugural Women's Rugby World Cup final at the Arms Park. They would run into a physical and fit USA once the whistle blew.

England centre Sam Robson leads the charge in the final against the USA, who would ultimately prove too streetwise. Getty

England number eight Gill Burns can only watch on as opposite number Kathy Flores gains possession at a lineout. Getty

WRFU secretary Rosie Golby presents USA captain Mary Sullivan with the Women's Rugby World Cup trophy. Getty

Sullivan, right, hoists the trophy high into the Cardiff sky with squad captain Barb Bond, who had been dropped to the replacements' bench for the final despite scoring the winning try against New Zealand in the last four. Getty

The winning USA squad celebrate with the trophy at the VIP dinner that brought the tournament to a close. Getty

Mary Forsyth (left) and Deborah Griffin pose for a selfie during the VIP dinner at the National Sports Centre for Wales on 14 April, 1991.

Alice Cooper (left) hits the dance floor at the VIP dinner.

John Taylor and Deborah James, who worked on the World Cup for John Taylor International, pictured during the VIP dinner.

Official tournament photographer Eileen Langsley finds herself on the other end of the lens.

AUTHOR NOTE

THIS BOOK CENTRES on the inspiring stories of a group of pioneering women who refused to conform to society's expectations of them. Many of those who feature in these pages possess both an infectious love of rugby and a relentless drive to improve the lot of women who wish to play it. Kathy Flores, who tragically died in October 2021, was one of those women. Captain of the first ever USA women's national team, a member of the squad that competed in the first two Women's Rugby World Cups and coach of the Women's Eagles at the tournament in 2006 and 2010, there is not much she didn't achieve in her 40-plus years associated with the game. 'She basically was always trailblazing,' former USA prop Jamie Burke told me shortly after Kathy had passed away from colon cancer.

I had the privilege of speaking to Kathy for this book in May 2020. Her thoughts and opinions are quoted in the following pages in the present tense as they were spoken at the time. This is in keeping with the style of the book and is not intended to cause offence to anyone reading.

Surnames used in the book are, to the best of my knowledge, those that the person in question used at the time of the World Cup. Mary Forsyth, for example, is referred to throughout as Mary Forsyth, even when relaying an anecdote or story from a time when she would have been known by her maiden name, Schofield. Sue Dorrington is referred to as such throughout. Although her official surname was Wachholz-Dorrington in 1991, she went by Dorrington professionally, including in correspondence related to the organisation of the World Cup, and continues to do so today.

*To my Dad, who is the reason I first picked up an oval ball, and to Romy,
who I hope will grow up in a world that allows her to be
whatever and whoever she wants to be.*

FOREWORD

HAVING BEEN INTERVIEWED by Martyn Thomas on several occasions, it was great to see his journalistic skills used to shine a light on such a significant and important moment in the history of women's rugby and it is an honour to write this foreword. As a current Red Rose who has been lucky enough to have played in three World Cups to date and is hoping to be involved in a fourth, when the world of rugby heads to New Zealand for RWC 2021 playing in 2022, I have never had to give a second thought to having the opportunity to compete at the tournament. However, this has not always been the case and it was therefore compelling reading to understand not only the history of the game and how women struggled to be accepted within the sport but also how the first Women's Rugby World Cup came about.

After reading *World in Their Hands*, I feel rather ignorant that my understanding and knowledge of the history of the great sport that I have loved playing for over 25 years was so poor. Martyn's decision to take us back to the 19th century to give the reader an understanding of the history of both women's and men's rugby helps to showcase the landscape around the world which would inevitably pave the way for the first Women's World Cup.

I now have an appreciation of how the women's game struggled to be included and accepted across the world, which really does make me thankful for the era of the game I have been so lucky to play in. Having been part of an amateur era for much of my career, I can empathise with some of the struggles the women of the past went through. However, I have never had to be in fear of playing rugby or had to fight incredible battles to be allowed to play, and I am now so lucky to call myself a professional player – something that without these incredible women and men I might never have been able to do.

The first-hand accounts we hear throughout the book from Deborah Griffin, Alice Cooper, Sue Dorrington and Mary Forsyth really bring the story to life and gives a wonderful insight into what the organising committee went through from both a logistical point of view and an emotional one as well.

I believe that most players today take for granted being able to play in a World Cup. Not from a selection point of view but from the fact that there is one to play in and it is something that just happens every four years. I don't believe many would have any appreciation of how it began. Therefore, it is with great thanks that the players of today and future generations owe a debt to Griffin, Cooper, Dorrington and Forsyth for their perseverance, persistence and stubbornness to ensure that the first World Cup in 1991 took place. The ambition and risks that they took to ensure the tournament happened created a moment in history that changed the game forever.

We must also not forget those from across the world who went before Griffin, Cooper, Dorrington and Forsyth for everything they did in the fight for women to play rugby from Laurie O'Reilly to Henri Fléchon and Helen Matthews to Emily Valentine, Nita Webbe and everybody in between. Without these incredible, and at times brave, pioneers, the game would certainly not be where it is today and everyone within women's rugby can be eternally grateful.

I would highly recommend this book to any player past or present to understand the history of the amazing tournament we are extremely lucky to get an opportunity to play in every four years. Many, many players would have loved to but never had the opportunity.

Thank you, Martyn, for bringing this story to life.

Sarah Hunter
England captain



STATE OF THE UNION

IN LATE AUGUST 1990, an envelope dropped through the letter box of the North London flat Deborah Griffin shared with her husband Chris Brown. Griffin was 31 and around seven months pregnant with the couple's first child Victoria, who would be born a little over two months later. But as the correspondence flopped onto the floor on that summer morning, the expectant mother had little desire to wind down.

A successful accountant at a firm in the City of London, Griffin was also one of the most influential figures in Britain's burgeoning women's rugby scene. Since first picking up an oval ball as a student a dozen years previously, she had been at the forefront of the movement which had helped female participation blossom from a few university teams and one club side in Wales into an organised structure. Thanks to Griffin and others, a dedicated governing body now oversaw a league and cup system, as well as both regional and international representative sides.

In 1983, Griffin had been a founding member of the Women's Rugby Football Union (WRFU), which ran the women's game in England, Scotland and Wales and was looking to expand into Ireland. A year later, she helped set up England's first female club, Finchley WRFC, before, in 1986, leaving North West London with her teammates and moving south to Richmond to take advantage of better facilities and rights at the city's second oldest club.

During this time, Griffin held various roles within the WRFU, and her flat at 224A Camden Road had become a de facto PO Box for the organisation. Scores of letters and faxes would arrive from clubs and national bodies across the world enquiring about the progress of the women's game in the UK and Ireland and seeking advice on all manner of subjects, from setting up the game in their own locales to organising fixtures for future tours. More recently, the correspondence had almost exclusively been concerned with Griffin's latest and most ambitious project: the first Women's Rugby World Cup.

The WRFU had agreed to host a European Cup in 1991 following a relatively successful first edition in eastern France in 1988. By the end of 1989, however, enquiries had reached the organisation from teams beyond the Continent, first from two US club sides and then the national associations responsible for the women's game in the USA, Canada and New Zealand. Although these approaches were tentative, they were taken seriously enough that WRFU treasurer Kim Rowland sought the advice of the organisation's insurance brokers on staging a World Cup consisting of 'between five and six teams' during a meeting on 9 January 1990.

Four days later, Griffin outlined her proposals for the tournament for the first time, at a WRFU committee meeting in Loughborough. She insisted the document produced represented 'purely my own thoughts to get the ball rolling' as she urged her colleagues 'to start organising this ASAP'. But the outline of the inaugural Women's Rugby World Cup can be seen in those early plans. Her peers were so taken with them, in fact, that they installed her as chair of the organising committee and asked her to make her thoughts a reality.

Griffin was joined on the organising committee by three clubmates from Richmond: Alice Cooper, Sue Dorrington and Mary Forsyth. Dorrington and Forsyth had played alongside Griffin since their days at Finchley and brought considerable fundraising and financial expertise to the group. Cooper, who had taken up rugby shortly after the team moved to Richmond, was a regular contributor to *Rugby World & Post*, writing about the women's game. She would act as the World Cup's press officer.

By the beginning of August, having received encouraging feedback, if not official confirmation, from the majority of teams invited to take part, Griffin had written to the man effectively in charge of men's rugby union, Keith

Rowlands, to alert him to their plans to hold a Women's Rugby World Cup the following April. Rowlands was the general secretary of the International Rugby Football Board (IRFB), having become the first paid administrator in the governing body's 102-year history on his appointment in 1988.

To purists, Rowlands' salary was the latest sign of the sport's inexorable slide into professionalism, as was the relaxation of the amateur code which he subsequently oversaw.ⁱ The general secretary was also a supporter of the men's Rugby World Cup (RWC), having voted in favour of the global tournament in 1985 as one of Wales' two IRFB representatives.

The men's event, which was first staged in Australia and New Zealand in 1987, had opened the game up to new commercial opportunities, and as a director of the 1991 tournament, due to be held in the UK, Ireland and France, Rowlands wanted to safeguard and expand those new revenue streams.

As Griffin thumbed the latest envelope to arrive through her door, she would have identified the likely sender by the Bristol postmark. But as she scanned the letter past the distinctive black, green and blue letterhead of the IRFB, she would have had no idea whether its contents would prove to be a gateway or a roadblock to her plans.

Whatever message was contained within the envelope was unlikely to deter Griffin (or Cooper, Dorrington and Forsyth) from the mission of staging the inaugural women's World Cup, but the task would be made easier by having Rowlands' support. The WRFU (the body which oversaw the women's game in England, Scotland and Wales) had grown independently of the men's home unions and as such did not fall under the authority of the IRFB. In theory, that meant they could do what they wanted. In practice, though, Griffin would have known that even tacit approval from the men's game would ensure the quest for teams, venues and sponsors was less fraught.

Rowlands was himself evidence that the IRFB was beginning to modernise and prepare for a more professional age. But was the Board ready to embrace women's rugby? The headed paper on which he had written to Griffin featured,

in the top-right corner, a rugby ball with a map of the world embossed on it. But if this small detail signified the game's desire to capture the hearts and minds of sportspeople across the globe, then it was at odds with the way in which it had operated for much of its first 100 years' existence.

Born out of a law dispute so fractious that the annual international between England and Scotland was not played in 1885, the IRFB came to life a year later following a meeting of the home unions in Dublin. England would not join until 1890, however, when they secured entry on terms deemed acceptable.ⁱⁱ This was an age when each nation played the game to slightly different rules, and disagreements over their implementation were common. Thus, the primary objective of the Board then, one that it retains today, was to act as the overall authority on the laws of the game.

As time moved on and the 19th century became the 20th, the IRFB began to concern itself with international fixtures and tours. These were largely confined to the outposts of the British Empire (Australia, New Zealand and South Africa), where it was believed that rugby could help instil the middle-class values of the mother country. Although each of the southern-hemisphere nations quickly proved themselves to be more than a match for the home unions, they were not deemed worthy of a place on the Board until 1949. It would take another 29 years for an eighth nation to be invited onto the IRFB, when France became its first non-English-speaking member.

It was not until the 1980s and the advent of the men's World Cup that the IRFB began to think and act like an international federation with responsibility to grow and develop the game outside the traditional nations. Until that point, it had generated no money and possessed no assets, headquarters or permanent staff. Not pivoting sooner has arguably made the task of expansion into new countries and territories harder in the ensuing decades. To understand why the IRFB operated as a closed shop for so long, you must go back to the very beginning, when the sport itself emerged into existence on the large, open playing field of Rugby School.

Although a code of football had been played on the Close at Rugby since at least the early 19th century, it was not until 1845 that anyone chose to write down a set of rules to govern the game. Before that, disputes had been settled by team captains, and amendments to the accepted rules were passed down

through the student body by word of mouth. Even after they had been committed to paper, the guidelines were guarded jealously by those who had been privileged to attend the public school.

The game formed an unofficial yet integral part of those schoolboys' education, one which was staunchly anti-effeminate. Rugby's famed headmaster Thomas Arnold, who arrived at the school in 1828, was no sportsman. He tolerated the playing of football only as a tool to steer the student body away from what he believed were the two biggest threats to a life of moral and religious rectitude: homosexuality and masturbation. The game as played at Rugby became tied to a notion of masculinity, the Close being considered a nursery for the next generation of leaders in business, government and war.

Like the vast majority of the population, women and girls were locked on the outside looking in, even as the game spread beyond Rugby. As it did, carried on trains to all corners of the UK in the minds of former pupils and the pages of *Tom Brown's School Days* and the Clarendon Commission reportⁱⁱⁱ, so the number of varying rules it was played to multiplied. In 1871, eight years after it was nearly subsumed within the embryonic Football Association (FA), a definitive attempt to codify the game was made when the Rugby Football Union (RFU) was founded. Three Old Rugbeians (A. Rutter, E.C. Holmes and L.J. Maton), lawyers by profession, were entrusted with drawing up rugby's first set of laws.

Each of the first five presidents of the RFU were former Rugby pupils, which only added to the nascent union's sense that it was the divine custodian of the game. Moreover, those men (many of playing age) had seen how their contemporaries from Eton, Winchester and other public schools had been sidelined when Association football became a sport for the masses and were not willing to make the same mistake. Therefore, as the sport grew in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it did so largely in the image of its middle-class custodians.

Rugby was promoted as 'the most ancient of British sports', a participation rather than spectator pastime which carried with it a certain social currency. It was a world in which the amateur ideal became sacrosanct and any developments made were viewed through the prism of Empire. International

rugby became a private members' club, akin to those in which the IRFB regularly held its meetings, being run by and for the benefit of a small number of nations. Women did not feature in this sphere in any meaningful way, certainly not as potential players.

By the time Griffin began plotting the first women's World Cup, the picture had been altered irreversibly by events of the 1980s. There was still a degree of English exceptionalism (primarily when it came to the RFU stalling on passing on concessions to the IRFB's anti-professionalism regulations to its own players), but the Board had undoubtedly adopted a more global outlook. Nine nations were made full members of the IRFB ahead of the first men's World Cup in 1987, and a further 25 were admitted before the end of the decade.

That was not necessarily a positive move for the women tasked with organising their own global tournament, though. Unions in less traditional rugby-playing nations (such as Canada, the USA and Spain) had already taken on responsibility for female participation. That placed the women's committees of those unions under the jurisdiction of the IRFB. Would those countries need to seek board approval before committing to playing in the women's World Cup? If they did, would it be granted?

It is unclear what the Rugby-educated Victorian presidents of the RFU would have made of women playing rugby, especially at Richmond. However, much like the notion that a team of Frenchmen could rock up at Rectory Field and beat England, it would no doubt have been heartily derided.^{iv} That is not to say that women were completely absent from the Victorian rugby scene, as we will see, but their role was largely restricted to that of supporters. Blackheath's Rectory Field was one of many grounds round the country which had ladies' enclosures, and Arthur Guillemard, RFU president between 1878 and 1882, once rather mockingly suggested that 'Lady spectators' were in part to blame for the decision to ban the practice of hacking^v.

Rugby was, of course, a very different place by 1990. The idea that the Welsh state-educated son of a policeman would land the biggest job in rugby (and be paid for the privilege) would also have been anathema to those running the game at the end of the 19th century. However, Keith Rowlands epitomised how both the game and British society had changed over the intervening century, albeit at a gradual, sometimes glacial pace. Victorian gentlemen would certainly have acknowledged the 'pluck' he displayed as a commanding second row for London Welsh, Llanelli, Cardiff, Wales, the Barbarians and British and Irish Lions, even if they may have felt the number of clubs he amassed undignified. According to Syd Miller, the 6 ft 5 in, 17 stone lock had been the only Lion 'capable of matching the huge Springboks in physicality' during the 1962 tour of South Africa.

Rowlands' playing career was brought to an end by a broken leg, suffered against one of those former clubs, London Welsh, on New Year's Eve 1966. Eight weeks previously he had captained Cardiff to a famous win over Australia at the Arms Park, but as that door closed, another opened into the world of administration. On hanging up his boots, Rowlands entered the committee room at Cardiff, becoming chairman for the 1974/75 season. His profile rose as chairman of selectors during a particularly successful time for the Welsh Rugby Union, and he was appointed one of the body's two representatives on the IRFB in 1983.

Less than two years later, in March 1985, Rowlands played a key role as the sport underwent its most seismic change since the 'Big Split' which had ripped it in two^{vi}. At the pivotal IRFB meeting in Paris that month, called to run the rule over a feasibility study into a potential men's Rugby World Cup, the Welshman voted in favour of the plans proposed by Australia and New Zealand. All four representatives from Ireland and Scotland had rejected the idea, as the Home Unions had done repeatedly over the previous century, but Rowlands and England's John Kendall-Carpenter were persuaded to split their respective nations' votes, thus ensuring the proposal was carried by ten votes to six.^{vii}

Rowlands had staked his reputation on the World Cup being a success, serving on the organising committee of the inaugural tournament in Australia and New Zealand. It was a gamble which paid off handsomely. Rugby World

Cup 1987 opened the game up to a raft of new commercial, broadcast and sponsorship opportunities, and the IRFB was keen to exploit those further when the tournament came to Europe four years later. In his role as director of the 1991 World Cup, Rowlands had been part of the negotiations which ended in October 1989 with ITV and Channel 4 signing a television deal worth around £3m. At the time, he said the tournament would be 'the biggest sporting event held in the UK since the soccer World Cup in 1966'. 'It is up to us to set standards for others to follow', he added, 'and we are in no way ashamed to seek sponsorship to strengthen the sport'.

Eight months later, commercial director Alan Callan predicted the men's tournament would generate £66m, including £41m in sponsorship and 'commercial spin-offs'. However, by the time Griffin's original letter dropped through Rowlands' letter box, those projections were beginning to look overly optimistic. With a little more than a year to go until the tournament kicked off, the men's World Cup had failed to sign a single deal with an event sponsor. Heinz would pay £1m to come on board before the end of 1990, but that sum was half what Callan and his company CPMA had promised for each of the eight packages available. Pressure on the IRFB and its organising committee (and therefore on Rowlands) was building, and it is not surprising that it would seek to safeguard its product from anything it thought could threaten or devalue it.

In his reply to Griffin, Rowlands did not warn her against staging a women's World Cup. He had no right to. As a non-affiliated body, the IRFB did not have any jurisdiction over what the WRFU did. 'However, I did obviously convey to John [Taylor, whose company would assist the hunt for sponsorship for the women's World Cup] my concern at an event which, without detail of timing or content, could act as a counter to the efforts of our event in 1991 in terms of media, sponsorship, public support and interest', Rowlands wrote. 'The very fact that this event came as a surprise to me gave me some concern.'

The IRFB secretary went on to ask Griffin to provide a 'broad outline' of her plans 'so that I can keep the organisers of Rugby World Cup informed and at the same time ensure that there is no real conflict of interest between us.' Rowlands signed off by praising the 'passion and respect for the spirit and

traditions of our Game, held within women's rugby', but the tone of the correspondence could, and maybe should, have set off alarm bells within the Women's Rugby World Cup organising committee.

Griffin, Cooper, Dorrington and Forsyth were not looking for the kind of sums that the IRFB believed would swell its coffers, but the £100,000 they did hope to raise was no small beer. If companies were pausing for thought about sponsoring a tournament with a multi-million-pound broadcast deal in place, how would a competition due to be played largely at small provincial grounds with no guaranteed live coverage fare?

ⁱ On his sudden death in November 2006, Keith Rowlands' obituary in *The Times* stated that 'the Welshman ... was at the heart of the transition of rugby union from amateurism to professionalism'.

ⁱⁱ England's Rugby Football Union refused to join the Board on an equal footing to the other home unions, arguing that it deserved a bigger say as it was home to the majority of clubs. Ultimately, England were given six votes, while Ireland, Scotland and Wales each had two.

ⁱⁱⁱ A royal commission of 1861–64, the Clarendon Commission examined the governance and curriculum of nine public schools in England. Among other aspects, it praised Rugby's ethos of sporting competition.

^{iv} Following the formation of the Football Association, it took six meetings to agree on a set of rules to govern the game. For much of that process there was hope concessions could be found to allow clubs playing under Rugby rules to join. However, when in the final meeting it became obvious that the new body would ban hacking, Blackheath's Francis Maule Campbell stormed out in disgust. He argued that doing so would 'do away with all the courage and pluck of the game, and I will be bound to bring over a lot of Frenchmen, who would beat you with a week's practice'.

^v Hacking was the practice of bringing an opponent to ground by kicking his or her shins.

^{vi} On the 29th August, 1895 representatives of 21 clubs met at the George Hotel in Huddersfield and agreed to establish a Northern Rugby Football Union 'on the principle of payment for bona-fide broken-time only'. Battle lines were drawn as the group resigned en masse from the RFU, which hastily drew up a definition of professionalism and rules to outlaw it. Clubs and players found guilty of transgressing those laws were banned for life, but that could not stop a drain of teams from Lancashire and Yorkshire flowing to what would become rugby league.

^{vii} The delegates from Australia, New Zealand, France and South Africa all voted in favour.



EARLY PIONEERS

SCOTLAND DID NOT send a team to the inaugural Women's Rugby World Cup, the tournament simply coming too soon in their development. That does not mean, though, that the country played no part in the history of the women's game. Far from it.

When proposals for the tournament began to be discussed in earnest at the start of 1990, there were only six women's teams north of the border, all associated with universities. Scotland would not contest a women's test for another three years, but those clubs were beginning to find their voice.

At a WRFU committee meeting in Loughborough on 13 January 1990, at which Deborah Griffin's initial plans for a European Cup were first distributed, the Scottish clubs announced their intention, via a letter from Ann Mackay, to form their own league. Up until that point, the six teams had competed as part of the northern section of the WRFU's Student Cup and came under the jurisdiction of the North of England committee. The cost of travel to matches and distances involved had, though, become prohibitive. Mackay, who was the Royal (Dick) Veterinary College RFC captain, therefore wrote to the committee to inform them that the Scottish teams would be withdrawing from the Student Cup. She requested that they 'recognise the new Scottish League'.

Minutes from the meeting record that the 'committee agreed Scottish teams (all college sides at present) should have their own league'.

Representatives of the six clubs were also invited to future meetings. It was the first step on the road to the formation not only of a national team but also the Scottish Women's Rugby Union in 1993. When the WRFU began to disband, to be replaced by individual unions representing England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, it was the Scots who walked away first.

The saltire might have been absent as the World Cup got under way in South Wales in April 1991, but it is possible to trace the origin of the competition's story all the way back to Scotland. Hundreds of years before football enjoyed a renaissance at English public schools and was co-opted as a barometer of manliness and split into Association and Rugby rules, there is evidence to suggest that women in parts of Scotland were avid players. Certainly, on 21 August 1628, Mr John Lindsay, a Church of Scotland minister in the village of Carstairs, is recorded as being appalled by 'the break of the Sabbath by the insolent behaviour of men and women in footballing, dancing and Barley Breaks'.

Games of football had been played in the UK since at least the time of the Romans and became a popular pastime to celebrate festivals, such as Shrove Tuesday (or Fastern's E'en as it was known in Scotland). Matches were huge amorphous affairs which pitted sections of towns (e.g., those who lived on opposite sides of a river, or married men and bachelors) or villages against one another. The aim of these contests was simple: to gain possession of a round object, the football, and propel it, although usually not with the foot, towards a target. These goals might be miles apart, and therefore the fun could last from dawn until dusk without one being scored.

It was not uncommon for these matches to leave a trail of damaged property and broken limbs, and football therefore aroused the suspicion of the authorities. Playing of it was banned in London by Edward II in 1314, and several monarchs over the succeeding centuries issued similar proclamations. Under Henry VIII, it became a penal offence to keep a house or ground designated for football, but that did not do much to quell the sport's popularity. Indeed, 28 years after the incident in Carstairs, a minister in nearby Lamington wrote of 'one superstitious and abominable custom that has continued still in the parish, that men and women used promiscuously to play at foot-ball upon Fasting's even'.



The winning USA squad celebrate with the trophy at the VIP dinner that brought the tournament to a close. Getty



Mary Forsyth (left) and Deborah Griffin pose for a selfie during the VIP dinner at the National Sports Centre for Wales on 14 April, 1991.



Alice Cooper (left) hits the dance floor at the VIP dinner.