

# Swiss Women's Development Project 2016-17

## Final Report

The Swiss Rugby Union (FSR) launched its new Women's Rugby Development Project this season, and it has been a great success on every level. This report outlines the challenges, the approach, and the result of this season's effort to help Women's Rugby reach new levels in the little alpine country in the middle of Europe.



8 participating teams with their coaches, 25 U18 girls and the organizers on event day 5 in Winterthur

### The swiss situation

In order to understand our approach, it is important to understand our particular challenges: Women's rugby in Switzerland is not exactly a well-known sport. On the contrary: The following was the situation until the summer of 2016.

We have been running a Women's XV's league throughout the year, which consisted of 5 teams (4 of which are joint teams due to low numbers of players in many cities) – as well as a Women's “Swiss Super 7s” series in the late spring / summer months. Playing time has been very low when breaking it down to the individual, and in particular players who were new to the sport have been facing difficulties gaining important experience on the pitch. In the current XV regulations, there is no playoff phase, which lead to an “every point counts” mentality and many of our teams tend to field their strongest, most competitive line-ups for each game. This has been making it very difficult for new players to develop their potential within a reasonable amount of time.

Between fall 2015 and spring 2016, we had an unprecedented positive momentum across the country, when 3 (!) rugby clubs independently set up their respective new women's programmes. The existing XV's league was too far off for the young teams this point in time, both in requirements for numbers of players as well as the level being played, so we needed to find another way to offer them playing opportunities.

### The project

In collaboration with all the women's teams (long-existing as well as up-and-coming), we worked out our Development Project for the season, based on the following pillars:

- a maximum of playtime for new & less experienced players
- a simple form of competition with maximum of rugby skills development (focus on the basics, before being able to move on to more strategic and tactical knowledge)

- a maximum of “sharing the rugby spirit”, i.e. The rugby values & social side of the sport
- a non-competitive format to discourage teams to start fielding their strongest players only in these events
- Inclusion of not only the players, but the whole team entourage (coaches and referees)

Due to the fact that none of the teams competing in the National Women's XV's league has a big surplus on players, the league tends to take a break every time we would hold a national team training (this is valid both for VII's and XV's). For this reason, we set 6 Saturdays throughout the season for our development project, always on the same weekends as our national team trainings. We had very proactive club responses when looking for organizers, in particular the new clubs, and were able to hold the 6 events all across the country to keep travel time balanced for all participating teams.

We designed a 1-day tournament, 7-side game format on a half-side pitch, with slightly adapted rules to ensure safety also for beginners. The small pitch enforces a lot of contact situations and passes, but at the same time keeps the speed at a safe and controllable level. At the same time, it allows to run 2 games at the same time on one single field. The 7-side game requires much less structure than the more complex 15-side version, thanks to which it is also playable (and enjoyable!) without much experience on the field.

Additionally to this, we used a “double referee system” throughout the whole season to give the players/staff to try out reffing and grasp a different perspective on the game, with the final aim to have more women signing up as referees in Switzerland:

Each participating team would need to sign up one person – many chose one of their players - as a referee for the day. This person could change with every tournament. These player referees whistled the games throughout the day with help from a certified and experienced ref, who would shadow and support them as needed on the field, while leaving them as much independence as possible.

## The season



Our first tournament took place in Lucerne in Mid-September, and it was a big success already: 8 (!) participating teams, a lot of great efforts on the

field, some very positively surprised player-referees, and a lot of happy rugby players & coaches at the end of the day.

Since this was a big first for this kind of project in Switzerland, we were very proactive in collecting feedback after every Development Day, constantly aiming to adapt what needed to be adapted in order to help our teams progress the most whilst being able to enjoy rugby at it's best.

We noticed that there would need to be some work done on certain basic skills, hence we introduced a **joint training session for everyone in the mornings** for the second half of the season. This would then be followed by a tournament in the afternoon. These training sessions were ran by both our DTN



and our National XV's coaches to ensure top quality, and all team's coaches were invited and highly encouraged to help us out for the training sessions. Besides the advantage of having some different feedback on important basics, the players very much

enjoyed to mingle with other teams throughout these training sessions, where a lot of new friendships were formed too.



Where we had only one female referee by the end of the 2015-16 season, a total of 3 (!) women got their referee qualifications in spring 2017, two of which have since been actively refereeing throughout the country's different competitions. This makes it a raise of 300% female referee power!

< Hannah Kendall, qualified as a referee in 2017, at the end of the ERRL-Nyon UI8 game

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> (of 6) tournaments, we were also able to include our **UI6- and UI8-players**, which deserves a separate paragraph below:

## The Young Ones (UI6-UI8)

We are facing an additional challenge in Switzerland: Rugby was brought to this country by the expats, senior players who had played in their home countries and wanted to continue playing in CH when they moved here from their home countries. This led to the situation where the sport is being constructed “from the top”, where we have much more senior players, and our junior section is only developing at this point in time. Taking into consideration the fact that there is a huge offer on sports, and rugby is either unknown or has the reputation of being very much a “male sport”, we have very little girls playing our Game. Up until they are 14, they can play with the boys, but then there is no competition for their age group until they can play with the seniors (I8, or from I6 with age upgrade if they are physically strong enough).

There was a strong call to include the girls from I4-I8 in the Development Project after the first tournament, and since many of them train with the seniors anyway, we started to organise “swiss joint UI6-UI8 trainings” on the same days. The girls would be able to travel to the tournaments with their senior teams, where they would be able to attend a separate training with other girls of their age group from across Switzerland, and play some rugby (game or tournament format, depending on numbers)!

We were able to integrate them from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 6 development days, which means they had 4 joint trainings / tournaments throughout the season (that is 4 more than ever before!). The girls loved it, and we are more than satisfied with the outcome for this first year:

- In collaboration with our regional association ACGR, we were able to send an UI6 selection team to the international Torneo di Badia Polinese in Italy in April, where we left a great impression and took home the “Fair Play Award”



- our U18 will be playing in the Paris World Games from 07.-09. July 2017.

We have never fielded an underage selection team in any international competition before,

so both of these achievements are big milestones for swiss women's rugby.

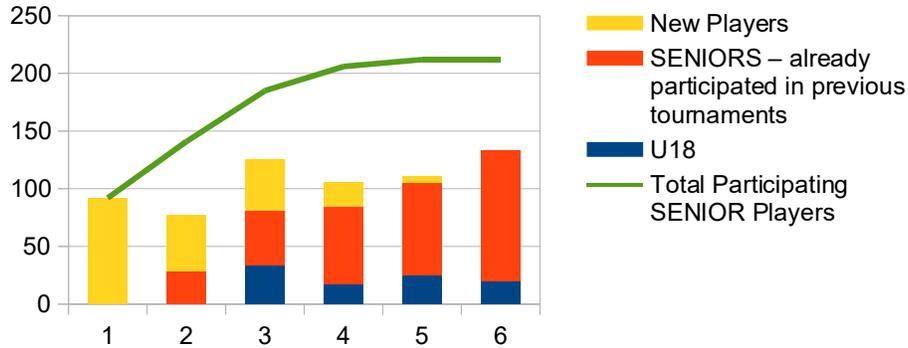
## Conclusion

The conclusion for this first season of development work is the same all across the swiss women's rugby teams: A very positive initiative which helped them a lot to develop their newer players, and through that lift their team's levels in general. For the 3 new teams as well as for certain joint teams who were able to split up for this format, it was the only "official" competition they could participate in this year, laying the base for an eventual participation in the XV league next season.

The numbers speak a language for themselves:

### Swiss Women's Development Project 2016-17

Number of participating players per event



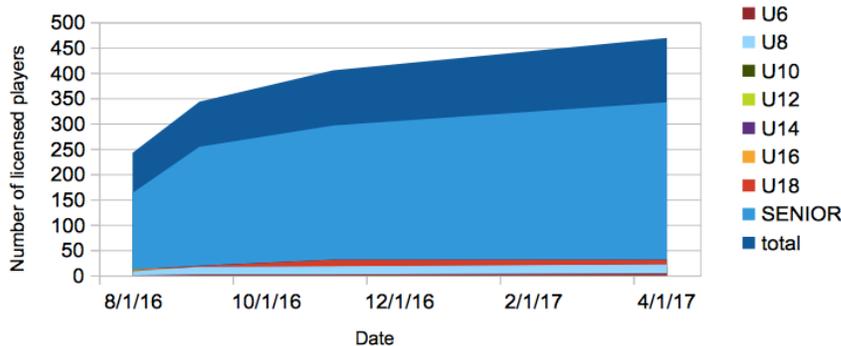
^ We had new players getting licensed throughout all season, up until tournament #5. Overall, 212 different senior players participated in our Development Days, as well as 42 U16-U18 girls

The Swiss Rugby Union currently has 5000 licensed players, of which 469 are women or girls.

In 2013 the Union had 2000 licensed players of which 100 were women.

### Swiss Women's Rugby

license statistics season 2016-17



< the license numbers for girls and women in Switzerland jumped from below 250 at the beginning of the season to almost 470 at the end of it.

The focus lay on senior level



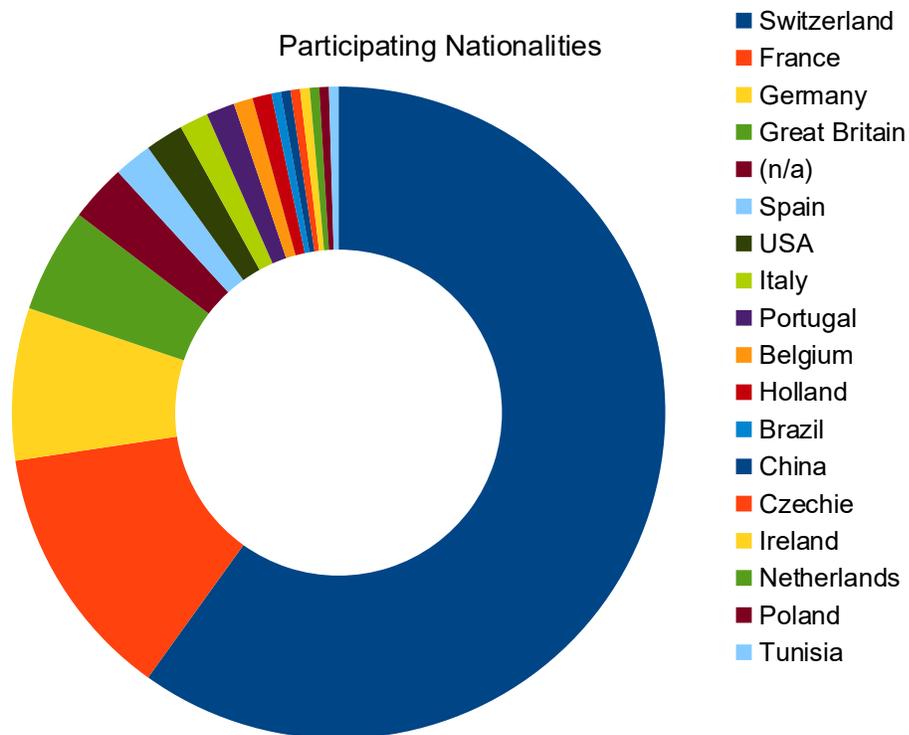
SUISSE  
RUGBY

— FSrugby. There stays a lot of work to be done for the young girls.

DATE	U6	U8	U10	U12	U14	U16	U18	SENIOR	total
8/30/16	n/a	8	8	9	10	12	11	163	242
9/24/16	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>343</b>
11/30/16	2	18	15	13	13	17	31	296	405
4/6/17	4	22	19	16	15	20	31	342	469

We have had people from 17 different nations from 4 continents (with a few unknown) participating over the 6 events, truly representing the diversity of the swiss rugby community. It's great to see that the majority were locals.

### Swiss Women's Development League 2016-17





SUISSE  
RUGBY

— FSI

## The future

We are proud of the success the Women's Rugby Development had this season, and even more excited that so many new girls and women have been able to take up this great Game of ours. This was a first season, and it's just the beginning – there are many areas we will need to continue as well as start to work on.

The main challenges for the next season for the seniors will be the inclusion of the new teams in the existing LNF Women's XV League, as well as the scheduling of our XV's league, VII's series and continuation of the Development Days. Player safety is most important to us, and there needs to be enough rest time planned between the constantly growing rugby offer (both in Switzerland and with international tournaments).

The Development League has proven a very fun and effective way of introducing completely new teams to rugby on a tournament format while sharpening the rookie's skills, which we will

continue to use to encourage the integration of women's teams into existing rugby clubs across the country.

In collaboration with our referee commission, we will ensure our female referees can develop to their full potential and stay actively involved in reffing.

We will extend our UI6-UI8 programmes and focus much more on projects for our grassroots age group, which will be the focus over the next seasons: The youth are our future.



For more information, questions or comments on this programme and/or women's rugby in Switzerland, please get in touch with:

**Christa Herrmann,**

**Women's Development and High-Performance  
Manager,**

**Swiss Rugby Union**

**women@suisserugby.com**