



USA Rugby's longstanding system of Local-Area and Territorial unions continues to take steps toward irrelevancy.

Like a side order of fries that you keep nibbling at while you drive your takeout dinner home, the system keeps getting reduced to the point that you have to wonder if it's viable anymore.

Here's what's happened so far:

Men's Rugby: There is no National All-Star Championships, and with a few exceptions, no territory has taken up the opportunity to play as a territory on tour or in some other competition. This removes one of the main reasons why men's rugby players pay territorial dues – to support a territorial all-star team.

The Super League remains the top league in the country, and crosses territorial lines; it has no relationship with Territorial or Local Area Unions (TUs, and LAUs).

DI club rugby has similarly crossed LAU and TU lines. While most leagues remain in a territorial system, the competition is really stratified into Competitive Regions, of which there are four.

Women's Rugby: The Women's Premier League crosses territorial lines the same way the men's Super League does. In DI, competitions have not paid the slightest bit of attention to LAU borders for some time, but do still play for territorial championships.

Collegiate Rugby: The development of the College Premier Division cut to pieces the TU borders. TUs have nothing to do with the CPD.

The new alignment of DI college conferences, including new ones for women, also throws out the LAU and TU borders. The conferences exist unto themselves, which is probably why the idea that the National Collegiate All-Star Championships is on its last legs doesn't upset as many people as you'd think. LAUs and TUs have no relevance to college players in CPD and DI, and probably DII. It's all (and should have always been) about conferences that make sense for the participants.

High School Rugby: Most U19 and High School rugby players are now members of State-Based Rugby Organizations (SBROs). They pay dues directly to SBROs, who report directly to USA Rugby, meaning those players don't have to pay LAU or TU dues (some do pay some fees to LAUs). In fact, it was the SBROs (specifically Rugby Oregon) that blazed the trail for this.

The last vestiges of the TU's importance to High School rugby died this spring, when USA Rugby announced that the 2012 National Championships will be invitational. That means, there's no need for the somewhat arbitrary TU seeding for nationals. Instead individual teams are invited on their own merits.

Referees: Referees run their own referee societies, with their own fees and dues structures. SBROs have shown that they can get their games referees without the help of TUs and LAUs, and often have a better relationship with the Referee Societies.

Sevens: Club sevens teams still qualify for the National Championships through a territorial qualification system. For some, that means a season of points-earning tournaments, for others, it means show up at this one tournament someplace and we'll figure it out.

This system still exists, although several people (David Pelton, Howard Kent, Alex Goff) have put forward ideas that would make the 7s club season more fun, more relevant, and more comprehensible, without worrying about the territories.

With the 7s summer season getting shorter and shorter, it makes even more sense to keep the territories out of it.

TUs still field All-Star 7s teams, but some would have that change in 2012.

So who does depend on Territorial Unions, and for what?

DII, DIII men's and women's club competitions. Meaning, TU and LAU websites keep track of scores and standings, and post referee allocations. Unions then organize playoffs to decide seeds to nationals.

Lower-division college competitions.

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Women's All-Star teams (Senior, College, 7s)
Men's All-Star 7s teams

Everything else is run by an independent league.

On the LAU level, they keep track of local leagues, and run LAU playoffs in some cases. Several still, to their credit, operate all-star teams at various levels.

How well do they do their jobs? A quick search through TU and LAU websites will show that some do an outstanding job of keeping up with scores, standings, etc. Others are downright bad, with information two, three or five years out of date. Some unions don't even have a website.

Most of that score-keeping could be run by referees. Some referee society websites do just that.

In the past few years, TU budgets have totaled about \$800,000 annually. The LAUs are about the same. That's \$1.6 million for a drastically-reduced job description.

That's a lot of money for so few french fries.

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