

Rugby League has a long-standing and significant history within Australian school sport, extending well before the formation of School Sport Australia (SSA) in 1981. The earliest recorded interstate schoolboys Rugby League competition took place in 1950, marking the beginning of formalised representative pathways for young players. In this first documented year, the competition operated under weight-based divisions, which were standard practice in junior rugby league at the time. New South Wales and Queensland shared honours in the 6 stone division, while New South Wales emerged victorious in the 7 stone 7 pound division. These early contests established the interstate rivalry and foundation that would underpin decades of school-based Rugby League competition.

From 1950 through to the mid-1960s, the competition continued under this weight-restricted model, with New South Wales and Queensland as the key competing states. The structure enabled schools to field balanced teams and supported broad participation across school communities. However, in 1966 the interstate schoolboys Rugby League competition was not approved by the Department of Education, resulting in the only confirmed interruption to the early series. No matches were conducted during that year, and it temporarily halted the progression of what had become a valued annual sporting fixture.

The competition resumed in 1967, marking a pivotal point in its evolution. When play recommenced, the weight divisions were removed and the championship was contested as a single open-weight competition. This structural shift modernised the interstate series, aligning it more closely with contemporary school sport practice and simplifying selection and administration processes. Importantly, 1967 also marked the beginning of a more inclusive and expanded era for schoolboys Rugby League, as the competition gradually extended beyond New South Wales and Queensland to involve other states and territories. Over time, all Australian jurisdictions were provided with the opportunity to participate, reflecting the growing national footprint of the sport.

Although the interstate Rugby League competition had been operating for more than thirty years, School Sport Australia was not established until 1981. Originally known as the Australian Schools Sports Council (ASSC), SSA provided a formal national framework for interstate championships across multiple sports, including Rugby League. The creation of SSA brought increased consistency to governance, rules, hosting arrangements, and administrative oversight. Rugby League was progressively integrated into the SSA national championship structure, eventually forming the 12 Years and Under National Championship that continues today.

The administration of the Rugby League program within SSA has been overseen by a series of National Secretaries or National Advisors, who have played key roles in the development and operation of the championship. Confirmed office holders include Kevin Corcoran of New South Wales, who served from 1998 to 2003, followed by Des Guy of Queensland from 2004 to 2012. Peter Yatras of New South Wales served from

2013 to 2015, and he was succeeded by Les Daley, also from New South Wales, who served from 2016 to 2025. From 2025 onwards, the position has been held by Martin Field from New South Wales.

The long-standing success of Rugby League within School Sport Australia has been shaped not only by the athletes who have participated, but also by the dedicated volunteers and officials whose service has created memorable and meaningful opportunities for students to engage in an elite pathway program. Over the years, several individuals have been formally recognised for their exceptional commitment to the sport and to school-aged athletes. Service Awards have been presented to Lucas (NT, 2023), Les Daley (NSW, 2023), Paul Crate (SA, 2019), Jonathon Tucker (ACT, 2016), Dave Cohen (SA, 2011), Glyn Sargent (ACT, 2010), Gary Murtha (ACT, 2006), Kevin Corcoran (NSW, 2003), and Ian Duncan (NT, 2002). Their dedication, leadership, and passion have been instrumental in strengthening the championship's legacy and ensuring that young people across Australia continue to access high-quality Rugby League experiences.

Participation in the SSA Rugby League Championship has varied over time as the sport's reach and depth of development differed across states and territories. New South Wales and Queensland remain the longest and most consistent participants, reflecting their strong Rugby League traditions. The Australian Capital Territory and Victoria have also become regular competitors, and other jurisdictions including South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory have participated at different times depending on player numbers and local development priorities. In recent years, championships have been hosted in a range of locations including Canberra in 2024, Townsville in 2023, Wollongong in 2022 and Brisbane in 2019.

A perpetual trophy named after Gary Baulkim is awarded annually to the champion state in the 12 Years and Under Championship. The Ian Duncan trophy was also introduced and awarded annually to the winning team in the third place play-off.

The SSA Rugby League Championship plays a vital role within the broader national Rugby League development pathway. It provides young players with formative representative experiences, complements state school sport structures, and feeds into later opportunities such as the well known secondary school competitions, including the Australian School Boys and Girls competitions. Together, these competitions support the identification and development of talented players from a young age.

The competition which originally had male competitors only had also evolved with time with a number of female athletes participating in the competition.

Players who have gone on to compete in the NRL and represent their state and country after participating in the School Sport Australia Championships:

Boyd Corner	NRL, NSW and Australian Captain
Anthony Minichello	NRL, NSW and Australian representative
Peter Wallace	NRL, City Origin representative, Assistant Coach Penrith Panthers
Mark Gasnier	NRL, NSW and Australian representative
Keith Galloway	NRL, NSW and Australian representative
Braith Anasta	NRL, NSW and Australian representative
Jack Bird	NRL, NSW origin representative
Mitchell Moses	NRL, NSW, Australian and Lebanon representative
Payne Hass	NRL, NSW, Australian and Samoan representative
Joseph- Aukuso Sua'ali'i	NRL, NSW and Samoan representative
Robert Toia	NRL and QLD and Tongan representative
Jye Gray	NRL, and Australian Prime Minister 13
Ezra Mam	NRL and QLD representative
Tino Faasuamaleaui	NRL, QLD and Australian representative
Enari Tuala	NRL, and Australian Prime Minister 13
Ghemat Shibasaki	NRL, QLD and Australian representative
Kodi Nikorima	NRL and NZ representative
Francis Molo	NRL and QLD representative
Andrew McCullough	NRL and QLD representative
Ben Hunt	NRL, QLD and Australian representative
Darren Lockyer	NRL, QLD and Australian representative. NRL Hall of Fame Inductee
Brad Fittler	NRL, NSW and Australian representative. NRL Hall of Fame Inductee