Rugby Pre-Season Training Program

8 weeks, with 6 and 4-week versions

With Phil Healey · S&C Coach

Phil Healey's record: Counties Manukau 2003-2008, Chiefs 2008-2017, Glasgow Warriors 2017-2018, Blues, Kobe Steelers, New Zealand head of performance from 2026.

A free pre-season guide. The full periodised 365-day program for your position is inside Elite Rugby App.

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https://eliterugbyapp.com/guides/rugby-pre-season-training

The eight-week rugby pre-season program

Count back from your first game: that number of weeks is your runway. Three gym sessions, two speed sessions and two conditioning sessions a week until week 7. A short runway shortens the base, never the taper.

WEEK	PHASE	GYM	RUNNING	CONTACT
1-3	General prep (base) Tests in week 1	3 sessions, 3 × 10 rising to 3 × 8, a little heavier each week	Tempo runs to build the engine, plus short sprints run fresh	None
4-6	Specific prep	3 sessions, 4 × 5 heavy, then 5 × 3 moved fast	Repeat sprints with short rests, plus 30 m sprints run fresh	Controlled: wrestle, technique, graded collisions
7	Pre-competition Retest this week	2 sessions, 3 × 3 moved fast	Flying sprints and short, sharp conditioning	Full, but short and infrequent
8	Taper and trial	1 or 2 short sessions, 2 × 3, nothing to failure	Sprint primers, the team run and one trial game	Match

How to read the tables

- **3 × 10** means three sets of ten reps on each of the main lifts (a squat, a hinge, a press and a pull), with neck and trunk work every week.
- **Moved fast** means a lighter weight lifted as quickly as you can. The set ends when the bar slows down.
- **Tempo runs** are 100 m at a steady pace with a walk back, ten to sixteen of them.
- **Repeat sprints** are 40 m shuttles (20 m out and back) in sets of six, with about 20 seconds between runs and three minutes between sets.
- **Flying sprints** start from a rolling 20 m run-up, so the part that counts is all top speed.
- **Sprint primers** are three or four short, sharp runs to wake the legs up before a game.

Speed is always run fresh, early in a session. Test in week 1 and retest in the pre-competition week, the same way each time.

The six-week version

One week off general prep and one off specific prep. The last two weeks do not change.

WEEK	PHASE	GYM	RUNNING	CONTACT
1	General prep Tests this week	3 sessions, 3 × 10 with a weight you could lift a few more times	Tempo runs, plus 6 × 20 m sprints run fresh	None
2	General prep	3 sessions, 3 × 8, a little heavier	More tempo runs, plus 6 × 20 m sprints run fresh	Tackle technique at walking pace
3	Specific prep	3 sessions, 4 × 5 heavy	Repeat sprints, 2 sets of 6 × 40 m, plus 6 × 30 m sprints	Controlled: wrestle and technique
4	Specific prep	3 sessions, 5 × 3 moved fast, plus jumps	Repeat sprints, 3 sets of 6 × 40 m, plus 8 × 30 m sprints	Graded collisions
5	Pre-competition Retest this week	2 sessions, 3 × 3 moved fast	Flying sprints and short, sharp conditioning	Full, but short and infrequent
6	Taper and trial	1 or 2 short sessions, 2 × 3, nothing to failure	Sprint primers, the team run and one trial game	Match

The four-week version

One week of each phase. The shortest runway that still works, and the taper still stands.

WEEK	PHASE	GYM	RUNNING	CONTACT
1	General prep Tests this week	3 sessions, 3 × 10 with a weight you could lift a few more times	Tempo runs, plus 6 × 20 m sprints run fresh	Tackle technique at walking pace
2	Specific prep	3 sessions, 4 × 5 heavy	Repeat sprints, 2 sets of 6 × 40 m, plus 6 × 30 m sprints	Controlled: wrestle, graded collisions
3	Pre-competition Retest this week	2 sessions, 3 × 3 moved fast	Flying sprints and short, sharp conditioning	Full, but short and infrequent
4	Taper and trial	1 or 2 short sessions, 2 × 3, nothing to failure	Sprint primers, the team run and one trial game	Match

Three rules if you are starting late

- **Do not try to catch up.** Cramming eight weeks of work into four is the too-much-too-soon mistake, and it costs more than it gains.
- **Keep the speed.** Short sprints go in from week one, fresh, at the start of a session.
- **Start lighter if you have done nothing since last season.** Run week 1 easier than the table says and add nothing extra.

Your first week back

Get through it healthy and find out where you stand. Lift and run at about three quarters of what you could do, and test once your body has had two days to wake up.

DAY	SESSION	WHY
Monday	Gym: the main lifts at 3 × 8 with a weight you could lift a few more times, then neck and trunk	Reminds your body how to lift before anything heavy
Tuesday	Tempo runs: 10 × 100 m at a steady pace, walking back, then mobility	Restarts the engine without a flat-out sprint
Wednesday	Tests: jumps, then 10 m and 40 m sprints, then the squat, bench press and chin-ups	Your speed and strength numbers, taken fresh
Thursday	Recovery: mobility and 20 to 30 minutes easy on a bike	Soreness peaks a day or two after your first sessions back
Friday	Test: the Bronco, after a full warm-up, and nothing else	Your fitness number
Saturday	Skills or touch with no contact, or a day off	Hands and feet back on a ball
Sunday	Rest	Week 2 starts fresh

The tests, in the order you run them

TEST	WHAT IT TELLS YOU	HOW TO RUN IT
Broad jump	Leg power	Two-footed jump from a standing start, best of three
10 m sprint	Acceleration, your first few steps	From a standing start, best of three, walking back between runs
40 m sprint	Top speed	The same start, best of two, walking back between runs
Squat	Lower-body strength	Work up to a heavy set of five, stopping with a rep or two left in you
Bench press	Upper-body pushing strength	The same: a heavy set of five, with a rep or two left
Chin-ups	Upper-body pulling strength	As many clean reps as you can from a dead hang
Bronco	Your engine, and how well you repeat hard runs	1,200 m of 20, 40 and 60 m shuttles, five rounds, no rest, on a day of its own

Time the Bronco free at https://eliterugbyapp.com/bronco-test: a mate taps at each return to the start cone and it gives you your shuttle splits.

Write your tests down

The number that matters is your own last one. Retest in the pre-competition week: week 7 of 8, week 5 of 6, or week 3 of 4.

TEST	WEEK 1	RETEST	CHANGE
Date			
Broad jump			
10 m sprint			
40 m sprint			
Squat			
Bench press			
Chin-ups			
Bronco			

Retest the same way: the same field, the same boots, the same time of day and the same person on the stopwatch. Hand timing is rough over a short sprint, so only trust a change that shows up on every run.

A mid-pre-season training week

Four hard days, one recovery day, one game-shaped day and one full rest day. Heavy and fast work goes early in the week and early in the session.

DAY	SESSION	FOCUS	DURATION
Monday	Lower-body max strength + short speed (acceleration)	Strength	75 min
Tuesday	Aerobic / repeat-sprint conditioning + skills	Conditioning	70 min
Wednesday	Upper-body strength + controlled contact / wrestle	Strength and contact	75 min
Thursday	Recovery, mobility, light aerobic flush	Recovery	40 min
Friday	Power + max-velocity speed + team run	Speed and power	75 min
Saturday	Conditioning games or a trial, then off-feet recovery	Conditioning	60 min
Sunday	Full rest	Rest	None

The rest of the year

This file is the pre-season. Inside Elite Rugby App the same coaching runs all year, by position: the off-season, the pre-season, the in-season weeks and the rest between them.

The whole guide, with the questions players ask: https://eliterugbyapp.com/guides/rugby-pre-season-training

Start for free: https://eliterugbyapp.com/join