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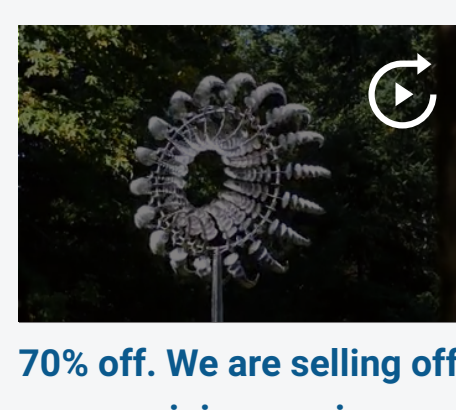


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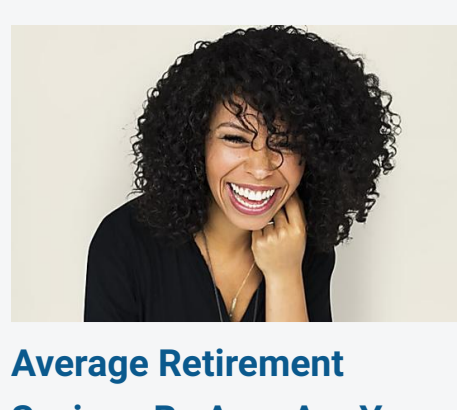


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The World Cup winning captains who have never held the World Cup

Dana Johannsen · 09:00, Apr 06 2022



The popularised origin story of women's rugby is it kicked off in the early 90s. The truth is, women have been trying to play rugby for about as long as men have.

Ahead of the 2021 Rugby World Cup to be played in New Zealand later this year, World Rugby has announced the engraving of the 1991 and 1994 winners onto the trophy - a significant step to recognise their important contribution to the women's game. National correspondent Dana Johannsen speaks to the first two World Cup winning captains about what the gesture means to them.

For a magic two weeks in 1991, Barbara Bond did not need to explain herself.

Back at home in the United States, the captain of the national women's rugby team was used to having to constantly have to justify her space in the game, whether that be explaining to well-meaning friends and colleagues that women do play rugby, or, at the other end of the scale, tackling opposition from within the men's rugby playing establishment.

The inaugural women's Rugby World Cup in Cardiff - a tournament dreamed up and organised by a group of four pioneering women in the UK - felt like 'coming home'.



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The USA take on New Zealand in the semifinals of the 1991 Rugby World Cup. The USA scored a major upset defeating New Zealand 7-0 on their way to taking out the inaugural title.

"The weird thing about playing rugby in the United States - especially back then - is you labour in total obscurity because people didn't even know what rugby was. If there was an article in the newspaper it was always in the 'Style' section like 'here are these crazy women doing this crazy thing,'" says Bond, who co-captained the US team with Mary Sullivan.

"You always had to almost defend yourself, or justify what you were doing all the time. So going to Cardiff, Wales - a rugby playing nation was huge. Here was a place you never had to explain what rugby is, or what are the rules, so that was just incredible. And we were among a whole bunch of women who all took rugby as seriously as I did."

"To us, it always felt like a World Cup, regardless of what the IRB said."



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Bond's team went on to make history as the inaugural winners of the Rugby World Cup, claiming an upset win over New Zealand in the semifinal, in which Bond scored the only try in a brutal 7-0 contest ("it was a pushover try, so it was really a team try"), before defeating England in the final at Cardiff Arms Park.

Three years later in Scotland, Karen Almond's English side avenged the loss, taking out the tournament with a 38-23 win over the US in the final.

But these events were effectively scrubbed from the record books when the IRB, which did not sanction the first two editions of the tournament, took over the stewardship of the women's World Cup in 1998, marking the first "official" event.



The first women's Rugby World Cup was held in Wales in 1991, but not officially recognised by the international governing body until nearly two decades on.

That changed in 2009, when World Rugby formally acknowledged their legitimacy and, by extension, the pioneering work of all those who contributed to them.

Now, World Rugby is going a step further and retrospectively engraving the 1991 and 1994 winners onto the trophy.

The move was announced on Wednesday on what marked the 31st anniversary of the first women's World Cup, as organisers of this year's event launched the start of the RWC 2021 (played in 2022) trophy tour around New Zealand and the Pacific.



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Bond, who now works as an emergency medicine doctor in Oakland, California, expected her former teammates will be excited by the news.

"I think a lot of people will feel like it is about time," says Bond.

"It was challenging to not have what we were doing at that time recognised, but people will be very appreciative also to have that accomplishment acknowledged, not just for our team but for all people who participated. There were so many people involved in trying to make that first tournament happen."



The Rugby World Cup 2021 (played in 2022) trophy tour will kick off this month, reaching fans across New Zealand and the Pacific Islands in the lead up to the tournament.

World Rugby chairman Bill Beaumont acknowledged that the gesture was an important step in honouring the dedicated women who got the tournament off the ground.

"Those involved played a significant role in paving the way for the players of today, and it is only right that their contribution to the women's game is recognised in this way," said Beaumont.

Almond, who captained the Red Roses from 1988-1994, says it will mean the world to her and her former teammates to finally have their achievement etched in the silverware.

Like Bond, Almond is a World Cup winning captain who has never actually held the World Cup. She says there was a trophy awarded for the first two editions of the tournament, but when World Rugby took over the running of the event, a new trophy was sourced.

"For us, the memories from 1991 and 1994 are still so fresh," she says.

"It was purely amateur, purely voluntary, purely a bunch of very dedicated women who basically drove women's rugby forward and tried to get a foothold in what was then a very male-dominated bastion. The adversity we faced really brought us together."

"We just kind of got forgotten about and put away in the attic, and it was really disappointing to know that there was a new World Cup and we weren't on it."

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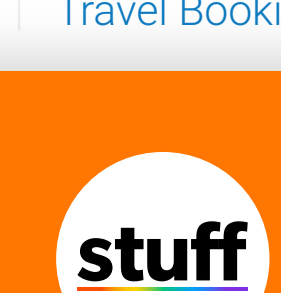
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