

# New era dawns for expanded Super Rugby league

The 2016 Super Rugby season, the first to feature franchises from outside Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, begins today with an expanded 18-team league. Among the newcomers are the Jaguares of Argentina and Asia's first representative, the Sunwolves, who will be co-based in Japan and Singapore. New Zealand's Highlanders captured their maiden championship last year and will again be a force to be reckoned with. The Straits Times looks at all 18 teams ahead of the 21st season of the most prestigious rugby club league in the world.

**Dates:** Every weekend from today to July 16 (with a break for international matches in June). Play-offs start on July 22, final is on Aug 6. Available on Setanta Sports (StarHub TV Channel 217).

**Format:** All teams will play 15 home and away matches, with two rounds of bye, across the various conferences. The winners of the four conferences qualify for the play-offs, will be seeded and have home advantage for the quarter-finals. They will be joined by four wildcard entries comprising the three next-best sides from the Australasian group and the best-placed team in the South African group.

## The teams:

### AUSTRALASIAN GROUP

#### Australian conference



**Brumbies**  
**Head coach:** Stephen Larkham  
**Captains:** Stephen Moore, Christian Lealiifano  
**Home ground:** GIO Stadium, Canberra  
 2015: Semi-finals



**Western Force**  
**Head coach:** Michael Foley  
**Captain:** Matt Hodgson  
**Home ground:** nib Stadium, Perth  
 2015: 15th



**Melbourne Rebels**  
**Head coach:** Tony McGahan  
**Captain:** Nic Stirzaker  
**Home ground:** AAMI Park, Melbourne  
 2015: 10th



**Queensland Reds**  
**Head coach:** Richard Graham  
**Captain:** James Slipper  
**Home ground:** Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane  
 2015: 13th



**New South Wales Waratahs**  
**Head coach:** Daryl Gibson  
**Captain:** Michael Hooper  
**Home ground:** Allianz Stadium, Sydney  
 2015: Semi-finals

#### New Zealand conference



**Blues**  
**Head coach:** Tana Umaga  
**Captain:** Jerome Kaino  
**Home ground:** Eden Park, Auckland  
 2015: 14th



**Chiefs**  
**Head coach:** David Rennie  
**Captains:** Aaron Cruden, Sam Cane  
**Home ground:** FMG Stadium Waikato, Hamilton  
 2015: Quarter-final



**Crusaders**  
**Head coach:** Todd Blackadder  
**Captain:** Kieran Read  
**Home ground:** AMI Stadium, Christchurch  
 2015: 7th



**Highlanders**  
**Head coach:** Jamie Joseph  
**Captain:** Ben Smith, Shane Christie  
**Home ground:** Forsyth Barr Stadium, Dunedin  
 2015: Champions



**Hurricanes**  
**Head coach:** Chris Boyd  
**Captain:** Dane Coles  
**Home ground:** Westpac Stadium, Wellington  
 2015: Runner-up

### SOUTH AFRICAN GROUP

#### South Africa 1 conference



**Bulls**  
**Head coach:** Nollis Marais  
**Captain:** Adriaan Strauss  
**Home ground:** Loftus Versfeld, Pretoria  
 2015: 9th



**Cheetahs**  
**Head coach:** Franco Smith  
**Captain:** Francois Venter  
**Home ground:** Toyota Stadium, Bloemfontein  
 2015: 12th



**Stormers**  
**Head coach:** Robbie Fleck  
**Captain:** Juan de Jongh, Frans Malherbe  
**Home ground:** DHL Newlands, Cape Town  
 2015: Quarter-final



**Sunwolves**  
**Head coach:** Mark Hammett  
**Captain:** Shota Horie  
**Home ground:** Chichibunomiya Rugby Stadium, Tokyo, and National Stadium, Singapore  
 2015: DNP (New franchise)

#### South Africa 2 conference



**Southern Kings**  
**Head coach:** Deon Davids  
**Captain:** Steven Sykes  
**Home ground:** Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium  
 2015: DNP (Relegated in 2013)



**Lions**  
**Head coach:** Johan Ackermann  
**Captain:** Warren Whiteley  
**Home ground:** Emirates Airline Park, Johannesburg  
 2015: 8th



**Sharks**  
**Head coach:** Gary Gold  
**Captain:** Patrick Lambie  
**Home ground:** Growthpoint Kings Park, Durban  
 2015: 11th



**Jaguares**  
**Head coach:** Raul Perez  
**Captain:** Agustin Creevy  
**Home ground:** Estadio Jose Amalfitani, Buenos Aires  
 2015: DNP (New franchise)



New Zealand's Highlanders, who clinched their maiden Super Rugby title last year, will be among the favourites ahead of this season's expanded 18-team league which begins today.