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PNGRFL ACADEMY BUILDS NATIONAL PATHWAY AS 2027 EXPANSION TAKES SHAPE

PORT MORESBY, 21st September 2026: What began as a pilot junior development program in Port Moresby in 2023 has grown into a national rugby league pathway, with the PNGRFL Academy now reaching more than 900 young players across eight (8) locations.

The program was initially introduced as the PNG NRL Bid Academy, using a structured development model based on professional NRL systems. In 2024, it expanded to Port Moresby, Central, Lae, Goroka, Mount Hagen and Kokopo, reaching more than 720 players across the U15, U17 and U19 boys and U18 girls age groups.

The Academy focuses on more than just playing ability, developing players through skills, fitness, discipline, and off-field behaviours while giving them opportunities to compete and benchmark themselves against young talent from across the country.

A national coaching structure was also established, supported by coach education, conferences, and consistent delivery standards.

By 2025, the program had expanded its staffing, player welfare initiatives and coaching programs while strengthening its links with schools and competitions. This has helped create opportunities for Academy players to progress into the National Youth Competition, Santos Cup, Digicel ExxonMobil Cup, and representative programs.

In 2026, the program officially transitioned from the PNG NRL Bid Academy into the PNGRFL Academy under national governance, with Enga and Gulf added to the existing locations.

PNGRFL Academy Coaching and Pathways Manager Joe Grima said the transition represented an important step in building a more connected pathway for young players.

“Over the past few years, we have moved from a pilot program into a national pathway that connects schools, junior competitions, representative programs and senior football. The focus now is on making that pathway more consistent and giving players a clear direction as they progress,” Grima said.

The Academy is now preparing for its next phase in 2027, with plans to expand into Chimbu, East Sepik, Jiwaka, Madang, New Ireland, and Southern Highlands.





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The new locations were identified following 11 weeks of travel across the country and an assessment against specific selection criteria. The Academy currently has 110 part-time employees and 11 permanent staff, with the planned expansion expected to increase the program's workforce to up to 230 staff next year.

PNGRFL Chief Operating Officer Tony Archer said the continued expansion reflected the importance of establishing a strong national development system that can support players and rugby league communities across Papua New Guinea.

"The strength of our game starts with the opportunities we create for young people at the grassroots level. Expanding the Academy into more regions allows us to identify and develop talent closer to where players live, while also building the coaching, welfare and support structures needed around them. This is about creating a clear pathway from community and school rugby league through to the highest levels of the game," Archer said.

Grima said the expansion would also strengthen the Academy's reach beyond player development.

"Expanding into these new areas is not only about finding more talented players. It is about creating opportunities for people within those communities to be involved as coaches, staff, and pathway personnel, while building a deeper national system that can continue producing players for elite rugby league and ultimately the PNG NRL team," he said.

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