



«Rugby Union is stuck in an 'English ghetto' according to damning new report»

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An in-depth report published claims that rugby union is stuck in an English "ghetto" and that the International Rugby Board are missing out on the vast new markets offered in Asia and the Far East.

A new in-depth report published today (sun) claims that rugby union is stuck in an English "ghetto" and that the International Rugby Board is missing out on the vast new markets offered in Asia and the Far East.

Among the other criticisms thrown at the sport's governing body is that it is undemocratic, unrepresentative and shackled by the voting structure that gives the eight founding unions a permanent veto.

The report is the work of specialist sports consultants including solicitor Quentin Smith, the chairman of Sale Sharks who also works for the legal company Addleshaw Goddard.

The input of Smith will make the IRB wary that the critical Premiership clubs are among the backers of a report designed to provoke debate in the rugby world. The clubs have long believed that they deserve direct representation rather than through the national bodies.

William Field, the co-author from consultants **Spectrum Value Partners**, refused to divulge the report's backers apart from saying that a group of "committed rugby people" had come together in an effort to force the debate.

Field believes rugby union has fallen a long way behind the efforts of football and American football in embracing new markets. "It's nothing less than a 'gold rush' or 'land grab' and the sport has to act fast," he explained.

To prove that rugby is an English ghetto the report claims that half of the world's four million registered players are in England.

Another disturbing statistic for the IRB is the claim that 97 per cent of those who watched the last World Cup came from the founding unions of England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, France, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.

Though the report accepts that the IRB has made efforts to develop the sport, it concludes that it is not acting fast enough. Some of the criticisms – the failure to gain sevens an Olympic place and the reluctance to promote Argentina into a major nation – have been regular critical topics for rugby pundits.

Field hopes that the report stimulates new debate. "We have developed a new website, 'Putting Rugby First', in an effort to put all the ideas together. There has to be a debate on what the future looks like and how the game will make that happen."

He believes the structure of the IRB fosters parochialism. "It could take just four foundation unions to 'veto' proposals agreed by 111 other nations. Unless the game shakes up its structure and strategy, it will not develop the newer nations fast enough and will continue to lag behind other more innovative sports in the competition for global fans and finance."

Field and Smith are urging that the IRB stage the 2015 World Cup in a country outside the major nations for the first time. That domination and lack of vision is compared to football's governing body, FIFA, who have already held two World Cups in north America and Asia.