

What is The Nations Championship? Explaining rugby's new competition, fixtures, format

Billed as a "North vs. South" competition, the Nations Championship will see rugby's top international teams compete against each other over two phases in July and November. The Six Nations sides (England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, France and Italy) will face six southern hemisphere teams (New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, Argentina, Japan and Fiji) across six rounds: Three in the "southern series" in July and another three in the "northern series" in November.

Here is everything you need to know about the tournament.

What is the tournament for?

The tournament is an attempt to add extra meaning to the traditional mid and end-of-year Test matches.

Typically, northern hemisphere teams will travel south for a series in the middle of the year and vice-versa in November/December, with nothing (other than pride) on the line. The Nations Championship combines everyone for a biennial competition that will have an eventual overall winner.

Teams will play one match against a rival nation before moving on to the next across six weekends in July and November, as opposed to the traditional multi-test series.

How does it work?

While countries will face opponents from the opposite hemisphere, they will be in a table with their domestic counterparts.

For example, the Six Nations teams will be in one table and the Rugby Championship sides, as well as Japan and Fiji, will be placed in another. After the six rounds, teams will face the equivalent team from the rival table.

For example, if Scotland were to finish third in the northern table and Australia are third southern standings, they will face off on finals weekend for overall third place. Teams will earn four points for a win, two for a draw. Bonus points will be awarded for losing by seven points or fewer and scoring four tries.

There is also a overall competition between the hemisphere, with points awarded in the final round of matches. For example, if Ireland were to face New Zealand in a finals match, Ireland would win a point for the northern hemisphere.

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