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New board seated, faces tall order

USA Rugby seated a revamped Board of Directors featuring well-regarded businessmen Kevin Roberts and Tom Wacker, entrusting the group of nine to reverse a string of financial and operating setbacks.

The new crew inherits a parlous situation: the union has made a series of annual losses and [has no business plan](#), according to its outgoing treasurer. Notwithstanding the 2005 sale of the USA 7s and a 40 percent dues hike, earlier this year USA Rugby was [obliged to convert](#) an International Rugby Board grant for new elite (“high performance”) programs to use for routine national team and All-American expenditures.

Meanwhile, the union’s chief executive, [national team coach](#), and another senior staffer all departed this past spring, requiring the IRB to delegate an interim chief operating officer and several overseas consultants in order to keep the Boulder, Colorado, office running.

“The new Board [is] charged with developing and implementing the annual operational plans,” USA Rugby said in a press release.

American rugby’s strategic direction is prescribed a blueprint adopted by the old Board this past March. But the plan requires an annual budget of [as much as \\$8 million](#), approximately 140 percent more than the union’s projected 2006 revenues, and has [been repudiated by at least one territory](#).

It is not clear whether the SOS plan (drafted by the “Successful Organizational Structure” committee, led by Irish sports management consultant Morgan Buckley) is binding on the new directors or the next CEO. Incumbent chairman Bob

Latham has said that Doug Arnot's successor is expected to be hired by September, according to people familiar with the matter.

The [new "outside directors" comprise](#) Mr. Roberts, chief executive of the world renowned advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi and past director of the New Zealand union; Mr. Wacker, an investment banker who served as the IRB's first chief executive in the late 1990s; Victor Hilarov, a businessman who served as USA Rugby's first president in the 1970s; Mike Mahan, a retired Army officer and rugby coach now fundraising on behalf of West Point alumni; Bill Middleton, an Antipodean investment advisor who has been active in past efforts to develop an American professional rugby competition; and Paul Tsuchiya, deeply involved in sports entertainment as vice president of partnership marketing for Visa USA.

Mr. Latham, who had [reluctantly dismissed](#) Mr. Arnot, defeated Midwest representative Anne Barry for the lone "carryover" seat on the new Board. Jen Joyce, the lone woman, and Dave Hodges, whom Mr. Latham [had forced to resign](#) in the aftermath of Mr. Arnot's firing, were elected by their peers as "international athlete" representatives.

The Board is slated to hold its first meeting in September in New York. The next chairman is to be determined then, the union said in a release.

The old Board, whose Friday adoption of a new set of bylaws effected the transformation, is now an advisory congress. Most of its 26 members, who generally represent USA Rugby's 7 territories, are to carry on.

In a related matter, a committee auditing the structure of USA Rugby's regular-season and championship competitions kicked off yesterday, under the direction of Alan Sharpley and assisted by Mr. Buckley. Interim director of rugby Alan Solomons has [already submitted](#) a blueprint for revising the American playing season and consolidating the territories to four.