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GOING FOR GOLD:

NEW ZEALAND WOMEN'S ELITE RUGBY SEVENS

IN A NEW OLYMPIC-ERA

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ABSTRACT

Rugby sevens will appear in the Olympics for the first time in Rio 2016. As the 2016 Olympics approach, many rugby organisations and nations are investing in rugby sevens, and the women's game in particular. This thesis examined the ways in which the International Olympic Committee's decision to include rugby sevens as an Olympic sport has influenced the socio-cultural, political-economic and organisational landscape of the women's game, globally and in New Zealand, where the sport is of significance to the nation's sporting identity. This study adopted a multi-method approach that combined document analysis and semi-structured interviews with 13 participants from different perspectives (global and local) to understand the link between global sport decisions and local sport implementations and address several issues of central importance related to globalisation, the social context of sport policy and initiatives, gender equality and rugby sevens in New Zealand. Key findings to emerge include the nature in which the Olympics has presented opportunities, challenges and dilemmas associated with women's elite rugby sevens. Ultimately, the unique contextual moment presented by the decision to include rugby sevens in the Olympics has contributed to our understanding of the International Rugby Board's and New Zealand Rugby's mandate to progress and develop women's rugby sevens. The extent of the IRB's efforts to embrace women's sevens into its global rugby community has evidenced both crises and opportunities; underscoring the significant research context for this study (predating the actual Olympic appearance of rugby sevens in 2016) in understanding and tracing the changes in women's rugby sevens in the current Olympic-era.

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

American International Group – AIG

High Performance Sport New Zealand – HPSNZ

International Ice Hockey Federation – IIHF

International Olympic Committee - IOC

International Rugby Board – IRB

Key Performance Indicators – KPI

Ladies Professional Golf Association – LPGA

National Basketball Association – NBA

New Zealand Olympic Committee – NZOC

New Zealand Rugby - NZR

New Zealand Rugby Players Association – NZRPA

Professional Golf Association – PGA

Sport New Zealand – Sport NZ (formerly known as SPARC)

Transnational Corporations - TNC

United States Olympic Committee – USOC

Women’s Sevens World Series - WSWS