



**The Rugby Football Union's Commitment to Player Welfare**





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# RUGBYSAFE

Rugby is a fun, exciting and thriving sport that builds healthy bodies and healthy minds and looks after its participants. Through the promotion of character-building values, rugby boosts self-esteem and self-confidence. It helps to improve social skills, tolerance, leadership, physical development, confidence, teamwork, discipline and how to deal with defeat. And as any former player will tell you, rugby helps build lifelong friendships.



“ In rugby there’s a place for everyone: big, small, thinker, grafter, slow or quick. Everyone in the team is equal and you can all bring your own personality. I think, as well, the realisation that you are part of something bigger, the values, it makes you a better person. ”

Jonny Wilkinson  
2003 Rugby World Cup winner

The community game makes up 99% of the playing population and differs from the game we watch on TV. The core philosophy of grassroots rugby is to create a fun and friendly experience in which all players can achieve their best, where it is much more than just about winning!

As the governing body of rugby union in England, the Rugby Football Union (RFU) regards the safety and welfare of everyone who plays the game to be of paramount importance. We do everything we can to make rugby as safe as possible, while maintaining the inherent qualities of the contact sport that so many people love.

**RugbySafe** is an overarching programme that encapsulates all the RFU's player safety and wellbeing projects to support clubs, schools, colleges, universities and participants at all levels of the game.



# SUPPORTING THE VALUES AND CULTURE OF RUGBY

Ensuring that rugby is a safe game to play is fundamental to making the game fun and fulfilling for all participants. **RugbySafe** is a vital tool to support the wider values and cultures of rugby.

## Teamwork

only by working together as a National Governing Body, coaches, players and parents can we strive to maintain the safety and welfare of all participants

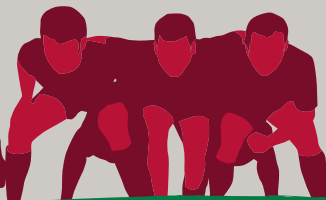


## Respect

we need to respect that rugby is a contact sport and commit to playing it in a safe manner

## Discipline

playing within the Laws of the Game is vital to keep players safe



## Enjoyment

a safe and secure sport that is committed to the welfare of its participants will result in a game that can be enjoyed by all



## Sportsmanship

playing the game honestly and fairly, avoiding mis-matches and ensuring the game is safe and welcoming for all participants



## Rugby as a safe sport

One of the reasons players love rugby is that it is a physical sport. That does not mean that we accept that injuries are inevitable. We believe that high quality coaching, officiating, medical support and appropriate player behaviour in line with the core values all contribute to reducing the risk of injury occurring.

“ Overprotecting our children – swaddling them in cotton wool – is bad for society, the economy and young people’s preparation for adulthood in a world full of uncertainties ”

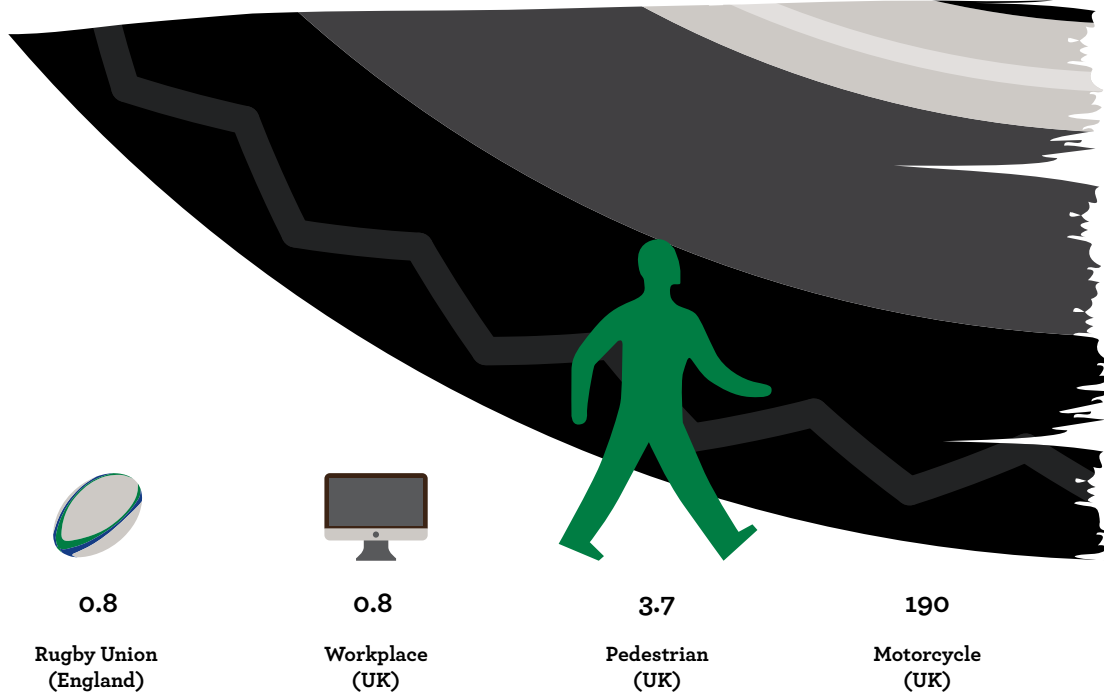
Anne Evans,  
Former CEO Heads,  
Teachers and Industry (HTI)



“ There is no evidence to show that rugby poses a specifically greater risk than other sports ”

Colin W Fuller,  
Centre for Sports Medicine,  
University of Nottingham

## Relative Risk



### Catastrophic Injuries in Rugby Union – An Assessment of Risk

Cases per 100,000 population at risk per year

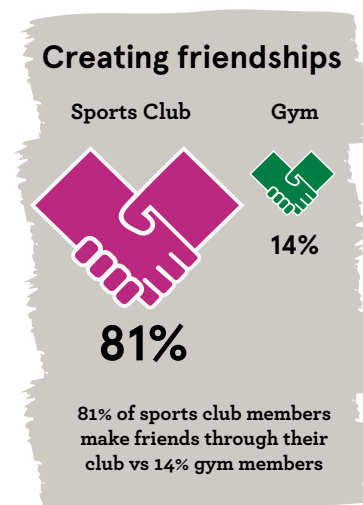
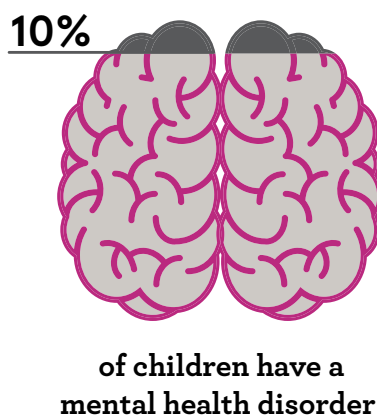
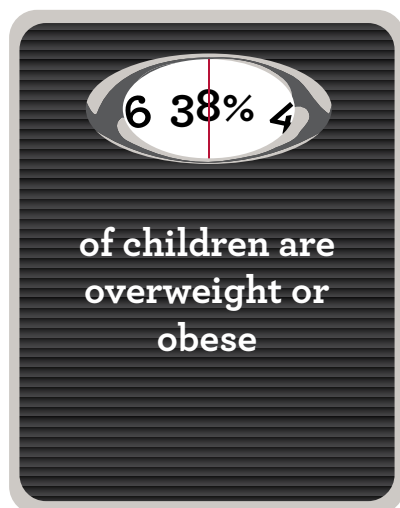
Source: Fuller C (2007)

“ ... As a paediatrician working in Ealing – and still a keen rugby fan – my view is that the benefits of playing the sport in schools far outweigh the negatives ”

Dr Colin Michie,  
chairman of the Royal College of Paediatric  
and Child Health's Nutrition Committee



Rugby is an excellent sport for ensuring children get a level of exercise which provides a range of recognised health benefits. The NHS recommends that children and young people take part in at least 60 minutes vigorous physical activity every day. Rugby is one of the sports they recommend for achieving these important benefits.



## Leading the way

The RFU is working hard to ensure that safety and welfare remains the highest priority across the game.

We have a clear process for translating our injury research into coach, match official and player education; and ensure it is applied in our policies and guidelines too.

**The RFU runs one of the largest and longest running community level injury surveillance studies in the world**

# RESEARCH

The RFU proactively commissions independent injury research and openly publishes the findings, making it one of the most prolific NGBs in this area.

The research informs changes to the way the game is played, coached and officiated, and supports clubs in providing a safe playing environment.

**The RFU is currently running the world's largest injury prevention study in schoolboy rugby**

## Youth Rugby Injury Study

- Examined 7,500 player hours
- Involved 500 people
- Study covered players aged 16-18

## Schools Injury Prevention Study

- Collecting data from over 50 schools
- Examined over 50,000 player hours
- Study covers players aged 13-18

## RFU Research

## Community Rugby Injury Surveillance & Prevention (CRISP)

- Run continuously since 2008
- Over 100 grassroots clubs
- Results used to train over 8,000 people in 2014/15

## Catastrophic Injury (CI) Surveillance

- RFU Injured Players Foundation funding
- Investigating every CI and 'near miss'
- Reviewing historical injuries back to 1956

# From laboratory to pitch

Global Scrum Engagement Sequence Study. Funded by World Rugby, conducted by Bath University, supported by the RFU.

## The Study

Collected data from across a wide range of teams, from schoolboy to elite international level, to:

- establish the degree of force that front row players are subjected to in their upper and lower back when the scrum engages
- test alternative methods of engagement.

## What happened?

Changes to the scrum engagement sequence aimed at enhancing player welfare have reduced impact on engagement by up to 25% in elite competition

## What does this mean?

Early indications suggest that this change has led to a reduction in the most serious injuries in the scrum



“ The scrum is a fundamental and dynamic part of our game... this is about putting players first... which could have significant positive effects on long-term player welfare. ”

Bernard Lapasset  
World Rugby Chairman

# Developing Coaches and Match Officials

The quality and behaviour of coaches and match officials is the single most effective factor in preventing injury.

The RFU provides a wide programme of development opportunities to increase coaches', match officials', teachers' and other volunteers' knowledge and awareness of the game and key safety elements.





## Concussion – Don't be a Headcase

The RFU has clear guidelines on how to recognise and manage concussion, and on returning to play afterwards.

The 'Don't be a Headcase' programme is recognised as the leading sports concussion awareness programme in the UK.

These guidelines are now being adopted by a wide range of sports and health bodies, and were recently used as the basis for National Concussion Guidelines for the Education Sector in England.

“ The RFU's HEADCASE resource is an excellent source of information for those involved with rugby. It is an accurate, thorough and appropriate source of information, based on the most up to date medical consensus ”

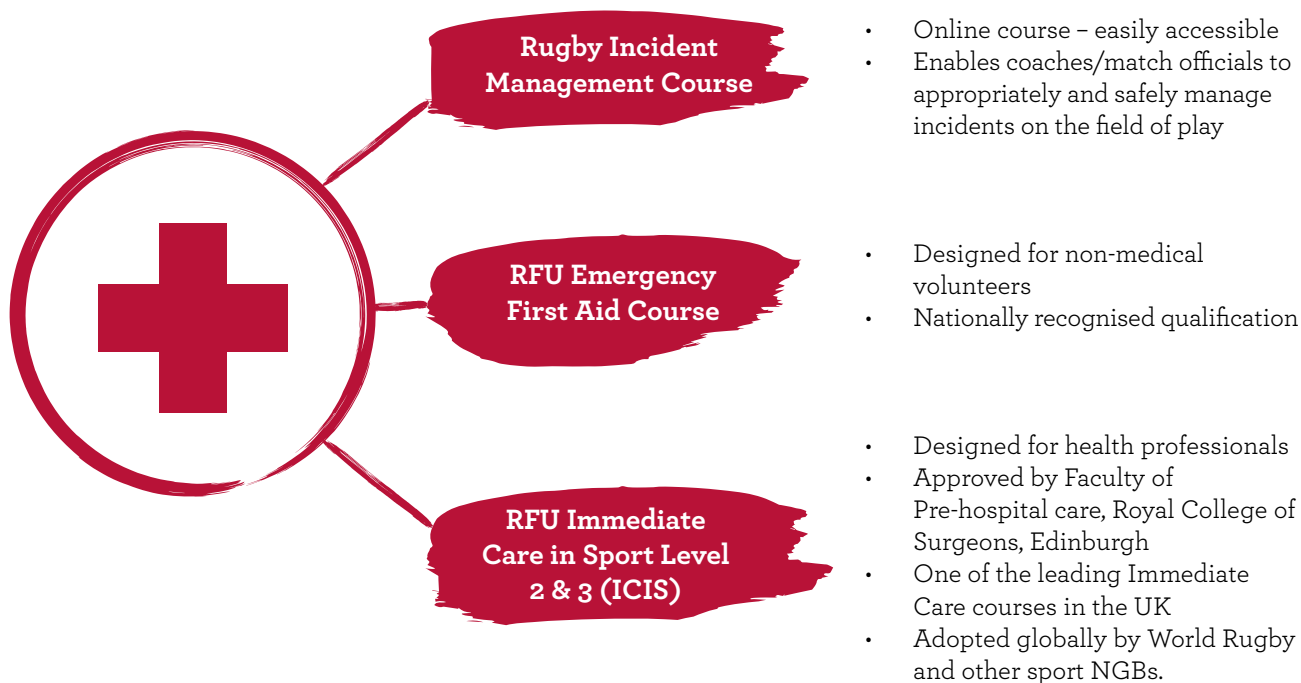
Dr Richard Greenwood,  
Consultant Neurologist at University College London  
and Homerton Hospitals



# MEDICAL AND FIRST AID TRAINING AVAILABLE TO ALL

If injuries do occur they should be dealt with immediately and appropriately by someone trained to do so. The RFU is committed to supporting clubs, schools, colleges and universities in providing such an environment wherever the game is played.

## Courses available for volunteers and staff:



## Anti-doping education

The RFU identifies integrity, fairness, equity and respect as essential to success in rugby; we aim to protect rugby from being undermined by doping and condemn drug use in sport as it is harmful to the health of players and totally contrary to the spirit of the game.

The RFU works with UK Anti-Doping and World Rugby to deliver a comprehensive anti-doping education and illicit drugs programme.

## Safeguarding Training Play it Safe

Safeguarding courses are available for any volunteer, coach or match official who is working with or has responsibility for children and vulnerable adults in rugby. Supported by a network of volunteer safeguarding managers, the RFU provides information and guidance on the responsibilities and help available for ensuring children and vulnerable adults are safeguarded appropriately.



“ The RFU should be commended on their continued commitment in all these critical areas... which will continue to drive awareness and understanding throughout the game. ”

Dr Martin Raftery,  
World Rugby Chief Medical Officer

# THE PLAYING ENVIRONMENT

## A commitment to improving facilities in club rugby

The RFU is committed to raising the standard of facilities at sustainable community rugby clubs, increasing the availability of high quality and safe playing environments.

Since launching its first National Facility Strategy in 2002 the RFU has:

- invested £27m in nearly 500 projects,
- attracted a further £85m from other investors,



The Rugby Football Foundation (a charity established by the RFU) has invested £17m into over 1,000 projects with a total project value of £60m.

## Club Accreditation Scheme

The RFU's Club Accreditation helps clubs to become more effective and efficient so that they are safe, welcoming and enjoyable places in which to play rugby. This scheme provides a framework for a club to show what it is doing, how it does it, and where it can improve so that a club can truly develop. Player safety and welfare is a key element of the framework which shows that clubs have a commitment to having suitably trained coaches and match officials as well as appropriate medical provision and facilities.

The RFU provides guidance and support to clubs on general Health and Safety matters including:

- Practical online guidance and resources
- Health & Safety experts available via the RFU Legal Helpline to support clubs
- 'A Practical Approach to Risk Assessment' workshop
- Health & safety is reviewed as part of Club Accreditation



## Club Safety Equipment Grants

Clubs at level 9 and below and schools involved with the All Schools programme that need help to afford essential items have been regularly offered grants from the RFU Injured Players Foundation. Since 2012, this scheme has provided over 2,300 free first aid kits.

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# THE GAME

The RFU has recently reviewed how playing opportunities are provided and managed in order to ensure a safe, fun and appropriately competitive pathway.

The Age Grade Review Principles and New Rules of Play approach aims to enhance the rugby experience for young players, coaches and parents to help keep more players in the game.

The focus is on the child and giving them a bite-sized, manageable programme so players of all abilities can develop at their own pace.

A recent comprehensive review of the youth playing structure has informed changes to age grade rugby, ensuring that the focus is player centred, development driven and supported by appropriate competition so that young players can enjoy a game appropriate for their age and ability.

“ The core of the programme is “Getting the Best out of Every Child” with their personal and social development underpinning and surrounding all other aspects of their development ”

Gordano RFC

“ Competition is important, but should evolve when the time is right. The Age Grade Review plan... will create the foundation of enjoyment and skill development for all players of all levels and abilities ”

John Mallett,  
Director of Rugby, Millfield School  
and Former Bath and England Prop



## Variants of the game

While the 15-a-side game is the primary version of rugby, the RFU continues to promote other formats which widen rugby's appeal and help introduce the game to new players. Often used at a local level as the demand for alternatives dictates, these versions include smaller-sided games (such as 7s or 10s) as well as conditioned contact versions such as Golden Oldies or Turbo 10s where tackles, scrums and kicks are modified to suit the number or abilities of the participants.

### Tag rugby

Tag rugby is the preferred version for introducing children to rugby. It is a small-sided game and while it is widely used in primary schools, can be enjoyed by all ages. There are no scrums, lineouts or kicking and the tackle is replaced by the removal of a velcro tag from a belt.

### Touch rugby

Touch rugby offers a fun and friendly environment to get involved in rugby and is widely played in a social context in parks and open spaces. It is a minimal contact sport played by men, women and children of all ages. There is no kicking and the only contact is a simple touch using the hand.



# LAWS, REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES - PLAYING A SAFE GAME

The information and evidence provided by research informs changes to the game at all levels to provide a safe playing environment.

Laws are set by World Rugby and dictate how the game is played. The Laws are there to protect the players and make the game safe and fair for all.

There is a formal review process with additional reviews informed by developments in player safety research.

Examples of how player safety is supported by the Laws of the Game have been shown by recent emphasis on the following:

- Scrum engagement sequence
- Spear tackle
- Taking the player out in the air
- Management of concussion



**Law 3.9** If the referee decides – with or without the advice of a doctor or other medically qualified person – that a player is so injured that the player should stop playing; the referee may order that player to leave the playing area

# Regulations

The RFU has a responsibility as the sport's NGB to set regulations so all participants know what is required of them and their club, school, college or university.

## Examples:



## Guidelines

The RFU produces guidelines which help clubs to consider their player safety provision; these guidelines are once again informed by our injury research.

- Injury Prevention and Management
- First Aid
- Concussion
- Emergency Procedures

## Advice

The RFU Health Advice Line and online resource provides information on player health and welfare issues related to rugby. It is available to all coaches, players, parents and volunteers. The advice line is not a substitute for one-to-one advice from a healthcare professional, but can provide useful guidance to ensure that players are supported in a way that complies with the Laws of the Game and in accordance with safe practices.

# NOTES

# RUGBY IS GOOD FOR YOU

## Health benefits of physical activity<sup>2</sup>



50% reduction  
in Type 2 Diabetes and  
colon cancer



35% reduction  
in heart disease and  
stroke



30% reduction  
in early death, depres-  
sion and dementia

## The NHS recommends:



**Vigorous physical  
activity**

## Rugby is recommended for<sup>2</sup>:

Vigorous physical  
activity

Muscle strength  
development

Bone strength  
development



Coach and referee  
education



Safeguarding children



Concussion education

Player welfare

**is at the heart**

of everything we do



Injury prevention



Kids First Rugby  
(safe, child-centred approach)



Club Accreditation



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