

# Shaping the Game

## Introducing Children to Rugby Union: Retaining Players and Developing Talent

Interim Report: June 2011

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## INTERIM RESEARCH REPORT SUMMARY & ROADSHOW SUMMARY

### Interim Research Report Summary

- A child-centred model is proposed for developing the game of rugby union for children based on the thorough understanding of:
  - The child: through biological, psychological and social development.
  - The game: focusing on 'on and off the ball' technical and tactical skills.
  - Coaching: highlighting the coaching process.
- Shaping the Game is a Rugby Football Union (RFU) pilot project agreed with and driven by three Constituent Bodies (CBs) and their clubs: Durham, Hampshire and Warwickshire. This research is part of a PhD funded by the ESRC and the RFU.
- During its first year (2010/11 season) the Shaping the Game pilot project has focused on the mini rugby game played at under-7 and under-9 level in England.
- 26 pilot matches and 15 AGR matches filmed at U7. 33 pilot matches and 21 AGR matches filmed at U9. The total length of each game varied, but the number of behaviours occurring in each game were standardised to a nominal, 10 minutes duration for comparative purposes.
- At under-7 there were more "involvements" per player in the pilot than in the current Age Grade Regulations
  - 185% more tries per player
  - 107% more runs per player
  - 69% more passes per player
  - 22% more tags per player
- While the individual analyses for the under-7 game are preliminary (and need to be considered with caution), it was found that 50% of the children in the AGR game could expect to receive less than 2 touches every ten minutes. Only 6% of players could expect this in the pilot game where 59% of the players received between 4 and 8 touches every ten minutes. This suggests that fewer numbers enable more children to get involved at this early age, where little passing prior to a tag occurs.
- At under-9 level.

- 85% more tries
  - 37% more runs
  - 16% more tackles
  - 126% more passes
  - 22% longer ball in play .
- In the pilot game the players are provided with more opportunities to combine their fundamental movement. With more touches of the ball, individuals need to make more tactical decisions in attack. The results show that players are making significantly more passes in open play in the pilot with nearly 16 being made per 10 minutes compared to 9 in the AGR.
  - More ball in play time at under-9 in the pilot provides for excellent physiological benefits for children as well as allowing for more tactical and motor skill opportunities. The increase of ball-in-play-time, along with the reduced number of players on each side in the pilot game should result in a game of higher intensity with positive fitness benefits for player.
  - Although structured contact skills are not emphasised in the pilot, contact is still a significant part of the under-9 game with over 16% more tackles completed when compared to the AGR. There are more tackles to ground and 'held' in the pilot, although the difference is only significant for standing tackles.
  - Taken together, the results provide support for the pilot games.. The under-7 age group game is characterised by lots of running, with little passing (in either version). However, the preliminary individual analysis does suggest that involvements are spread out more evenly when there are fewer players on the pitch (i.e. 7v7 in the AGR and 4v4 in the Pilot).
  - The positive results at under-9 provide exciting potential for the subsequent changes at under-8 and especially, at under-10 (year 2) and -11 (year 3)

### **Pilot Road Show Summary Report**

#### ***Hampshire Saturday June 25***

This event was very well attended with 19 from 20 clubs represented and 72 attendees not including professional staff and Colin Major

The morning session comprised of a report on the research for Under 7s from Gethin Thomas (Exeter University), which was very well received.

There was then a practical demonstration of the Under 7s pilot rules leading into the Under 8 pilot rules, with an open forum to follow.

The general feedback was of a positive nature and with the only concerns being of a local nature (e.g. festival entry)

The afternoon session followed a similar pattern with the presentation being on the U9 research, and the demonstration from players being the Under 9 rules and the pilot Under 10 rules – which was very well received by attendees.

The open forum was extremely positive, with examples of some coaches, who had been vehemently opposed to the pilot openly expressing support.

#### ***Warwickshire Saturday July 2***

This followed the same format as for Hampshire and was well supported with over 50 coaches in attendance. It was reported that everyone appreciated the opportunity to receive the research information and observe the rules in action. There was a positive 'feel' to the event and the concerns were, once again, of a local nature

***Durham Sunday July 3***

This was less well attended with only 10 in attendance. The date for this requires re-examination with other club fund raising events and touch festivals coinciding with the road show and thereby preventing attendance. No players had been made available for practical demonstration.

Although the numbers were small the discussion was stimulating, and the presentation well received. The general consensus was that the pilot was working well – however it was reported that 2 of the 20 clubs involved were still resistant to the change. They were not in attendance.

The dates for next year's road shows are:

Saturday June 16 2012 Durham

Sunday June 17 2012 Warwickshire

Saturday June 23 2012 Hampshire

**LAUNCH FESTIVALS****SUNDAY OCTOBER 30 2011**