

GUIDELINES TO RFU REGULATION 15 – AGE GRADE RUGBY

The RFU has prepared the following guidelines to assist in the understanding, interpretation and implementation of its Age Grade Regulations:

1. Provision of Age Grade Rugby Union Football

- 1.1 All Clubs and Schools are encouraged to provide facilities for the playing of Age Grade rugby. Special care must be taken to honour the RFU Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.
- 1.2 Each Club and School should have close regard to its health and safety responsibilities, and carry out and record formal risk assessments each season to ensure the safe and competent coaching of rugby and provision of facilities. Further guidance on the provision of a safe rugby environment can be obtained from the RFU via email at communityrugby@rfu.com.
- 1.3 The RFU strongly recommends that Clubs and Schools have suitably qualified first aiders present to provide immediate assistance to any player who is injured, during training sessions or during competitive play outside opposition.
- 1.4 Liaison between Schools and Clubs to safeguard the best interests of the player are essential.
- 1.5 Every effort must be taken to ensure that talented players are not overplayed and these players should give priority to school rather than club activities and to CB fixtures rather than School/Club.
- 1.6 Particular care needs to be taken on age ranges when Clubs and Schools are involved in organising incoming and outgoing tours from other countries. Clear instructions need to be given to their tour operators and tour organisers.
- 1.7 Schools that have traditionally played 15-a-side in Year 7 may continue to do so for now, with their Head Teacher's agreement. They should be aware, however, that in all other Schools and Clubs, Year 7s (i.e. Under 12 but may also be in some Under 13 teams) play Midi Rugby which is the RFU preferred mode for delivering rugby in this stage of their development. It is expected that such schools should be planning to switch to Midi rugby.

2. Matches, Fixtures & Training

- 2.1 The RFU and the ERFUSU are extremely concerned about the overplaying and over-commitment to rugby of young players. Those organising fixtures and programmes should take cognisance of the total demands placed on a player by his playing and training schedule.
- 2.2 The RFU Youth U13-U18 Structured Season is now in place in order to help young players and their administrators to avoid clashes and overplaying enabling a balance of fixtures to be created.
- 2.3 It is recommended that players in Age Grades (U13 - U18) do not play more than 35 matches a year.
- 2.4 If Age Grade players can only play and train on one day in the week then there must be a significant number of days allocated to coaching, technical and

physical preparation. If players are to improve their skills, they must not play matches each week if that then precludes their opportunity to train and prepare.

2.5 CBs, Schools and Clubs should plan on the basis that their better players might be unavailable to them during the weeks identified for CB, Divisional and International activity. Please note that activities take place during the week commencing the date shown, not exclusively on the weekends. Other important fixtures should be avoided during these weeks.

2.6 Schools & Clubs are responsible for ensuring that referees appointed to take charge of age grade rugby matches are adequately qualified or experienced to officiate at an appropriate level. Games in mini and midi rugby are part of training and should be refereed by coaches.

3. Coaching

3.1 The RFU strongly recommends that Clubs and Schools ensure their coaches acquire and develop coaching skills which are appropriate for the age grades they are coaching and qualified to at least Level 1 standards. This ensures improved playing standards throughout the game, reduces the risk of players suffering injury, increases consistency in the development of players and adds to their enjoyment and retention within the game.

3.2 In Youth Rugby (U13 - U18) attention must be paid to pre-season preparation. Players should be conditioned to play rugby rather than hope to become conditioned by playing it. Adequate fitness training, including special exercises for the front row, is vital – necks and shoulders need to be strong. The fatigue factor needs careful consideration – see RFU publications, IRB Rugby Ready Level 1 and 2 Coaching Qualifications & The RFU Scrum Factory.

3.3 In Youth Rugby (U13 - U18) prime skills like tackling, scrummaging, rucking and line out lifting need to be taught regularly, pre-season preparation being a prime opportunity to develop these skills. See appropriate RFU publications and videos, including the 'IRB Rugby Ready' booklet. For up to date products contact www.rfu.com

3.4 The development of all contact (contested or uncontested scrums and line outs) must be introduced using the techniques contained in current RFU coaching manuals. Tackling is a skill that needs to be taught and must be introduced progressively as shown in the current RFU Coaching Course materials. Similarly, the formation of the scrum must be introduced in a progressive way following the stages described in current RFU Coaching Course materials such as the RFU Scrum Factory resource.

3.5 The RFU strongly recommends that Clubs and Schools ensure their coaches acquire and develop coaching skills which are appropriate for the age grades they are coaching. This ensures improved playing standards throughout the game, reduces the risk of players suffering injury, increases consistency in the development of youth rugby and adds to the enjoyment and continued participation of players.

3.6 Coaching development comprises a combination of attending RFU-approved coach education courses (leading to a qualification), supplemented by attendance at coaching CPD seminars and regular reading of coaching materials and viewing

of coaching videos and DVDs. For further information on up-to-date products visit the RFU's website.

- 3.7 Clubs and Schools are strongly advised that qualified coaches supervise all persons who do not hold current coaching qualifications appropriate to the age grades they are coaching. Details of RFU-approved coach education courses can be obtained from your Coach and Player Development Officer.

4. Mini & Midi Rugby

- 4.1 The RFU recommends that for Age Grades U7 – U12 the months of September and January are used by Clubs and Schools to help coaches develop their coaching skills and, as appropriate, to qualify themselves to coach their current age grade or to prepare for coaching another age grade the following season. While team coaching/training sessions and competitive matches may continue to take place in January, this should not prevent coaches from engaging in such education activities and Clubs and Schools should give priority to coaches' education during these months.

- 4.2 The RFU also makes the following recommendations:

- (a) at a fixture, a coaching session should precede each match;
- (b) all matches should be used as an extension of the coaching session with the emphasis being on the quality of performance rather than the result;
- (c) during Mini-Tag (U7 and U8) matches only, coaches can direct and develop play in a coaching sense on the field of play from behind their teams;
- (d) at Under 7 and Under 8 age grade, coaches must help to encourage the carrying of the ball in two hands and prompt players to pass when tagged but should avoid interfering with the flow of the game and must not have any contact with players of either side while on the pitch;
- (e) the emphasis must be on enjoyment and players must be encouraged to enjoy the physical skills of running, passing and evasion;
- (f) during half-time intervals, coaches must take time to talk to, encourage, coach and explain the game to the players;
- (g) mismatches can be avoided by talking to the coach in charge of the opposition before the game.

- 4.3 If the referee decides that a player must cease to participate in a match, they must stop the match, call the individual player aside from the other players and invite the coach of that player on to the field. The referee must explain to the coach and the player why they feel the player's behaviour is unacceptable and instruct the coach to provide a substitute player. That player is to take no further part in that Fixture or Festival. It is the responsibility of the coach to speak to and educate the player as to why such actions were taken.

- 4.4 In the case of actions on the part of adults involved in Mini and Midi Rugby which contravene any RFU Code of Rugby, the recommended procedure is as follows:

- (a) the match or training session should be stopped and the match officials and coaches should confer and agree on a course of action appropriate to the circumstances. This may include the match officials and relevant coach warning the adult concerned or requesting the relevant adult to vacate the vicinity of the pitch before recommencing the match or training. In extreme cases or where the adult refuses to cooperate, the match or training should be abandoned;
- (b) the match officials and coaches should notify the incident to the Chairmen of the Mini-Midi Sections of their respective Clubs or the Head of Games in the case of Schools for further consideration. In extreme cases this may include banning the relevant adult from attending matches and/or training sessions for a period and/or submission of a complaint to the relevant Constituent Body;
- (c) where relevant actions fall within the RFU Safeguarding Policy, Clubs and Schools should also institute the procedures contained in such policy.