



Rugby Conduct

**A Survey of Spectators' Perceptions of the Values and
Norms of Professional Rugby League and Rugby Union**

November 2002

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**Report prepared for:
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Section 1:
Management Summary

1.1 Management Summary

There is a growing concern - articulated through the media, the public and, to some extent, within sport itself - that the 'conduct' of professional sportsmen and women is not as good as it ought to be – indeed, that it is in decline. In order to gain a more objective appreciation of this concern, and to help begin a dialogue about ethical issues with players, coaches, officials and others, UK Sport decided early in 2001, that it was important to develop a sense of the wider perception of values in sport and sporting conduct in four high-profile professional sports: football, cricket, tennis and golf. As a result, spectator surveys were carried out in the summer of 2001 at the Division 2 and 3 Nationwide League Football promotion play-offs in Cardiff; the Wimbledon tennis championships; the first Ashes Test cricket match at Edgbaston; and the British Open Golf Championships at Royal Lytham and St. Annes. These surveys were complemented by a separate survey on attitudes to sport generally amongst a representative sample of the general public. This new research focuses on spectators' perceptions of the values and norms of sporting conduct in professional rugby league and rugby union. It sets out data from the two surveys, carried out at major rugby union and rugby league matches in 2002 (see Research Design below), comparing and contrasting the two rugby codes and also commenting critically on a selection of the findings in relation to the other sports surveyed.

1.2 Research Aims

The overall project sought to achieve the following aims:

- To examine the UK public's perceptions of the values and norms of sport
- To examine whether the public thinks that sporting conduct as currently demonstrated by UK sportsmen and women is positive and relates to some ideal notion of the 'ethos of sport' and the 'spirit of the game'
- To examine whether the public thinks there has been an improvement, decline or no change in the ethical standards of sports
- To examine the public's views on the impact of new technologies on the values and norms of sport

1.3 Research Design

Two specific spectator populations were surveyed (n=416) at two prestigious sporting events in 2002: the Rugby League Challenge Cup Semi-Finals between Wigan and Castleford at Leeds, and St Helens and Leeds at Wigan; and the Rugby Union Six Nations fixture between England and Wales at Twickenham¹. The fieldwork was carried out by a team from the University of Gloucestershire Leisure and Sport Research Unit, supported by UK Sport's Strategy, Ethics and Research Team (SEARCH). These surveys were an addition to the previous four sport sample

¹ Where the term 'rugby spectators' is used it should be taken to mean both spectator samples (i.e. responses from both Rugby Union and Rugby League spectators).

(n=848). Where all sports are compared the data set therefore rises to n=1274². The data available therefore enables comparative analyses to be made about the two rugby codes in particular, and perceptions of six dominant professional sports in the UK in general. All data were analysed by Dr. Mike McNamee who led the project for the University of Gloucestershire in close collaboration with the SEARCH team.

1.4 Rugby Spectators' Perceptions of Sporting Conduct

Taken as a whole, the rugby spectators had a very positive perception of sporting conduct among professional rugby players of league and union codes. Nearly all spectators felt that professional rugby players acted in a fair and sporting way.

1.5 Players' Respect for Officials

In keeping with the positive trend, nearly three quarters of rugby league spectators thought that players respected officials whereas nearly nine out of ten rugby union spectators thought this was so. When asked more specific questions, however, the spectators' perceptions of players' respect for officials was noticeably less positive. While almost half of rugby spectators thought that respect for officials had stayed the same over the last ten years, approximately one quarter felt that it had declined and one quarter felt that it had improved. Moreover, nearly half of all rugby league and nearly one third of rugby union spectators felt that players commonly disputed the referee's decisions. Although perceptions of fair and sporting conduct remain positive, perceptions of this aspect of players' performances are less so. In the open question as to the most significant issue concerning their sport, 38% of the rugby league sample and 14% of the rugby union sample thought that it related to officials - whether in terms of the quality of officiating or the relations between players and officials.

1.6 Role Models and Professional Responsibilities

Respondents from both rugby codes recorded very positive perceptions of professional players as role-models. Eighty nine per cent of rugby league spectators and 83% of rugby union spectators agreed that players were good role models for children, with 25% of rugby league spectators strongly agreeing that this was the case. Moreover, rugby spectators (both those who were parents and those who were not) almost unanimously agreed that they would be happy for (their) children to play their sports.

In all sports, the relationships that players have with officials often set the tone for the contest itself. The role of the coach in setting out a clear vision of standards of conduct is also noteworthy. Across both rugby codes there was a perception that

² A separate omnibus survey of the UK public (n=1123) was carried out by the British Market Research Bureau. This is not commented upon here.

players themselves had the greatest responsibility for ensuring fair play, although what was perhaps more noteworthy was that coaches were perceived to be almost as responsible. In other words, players are not perceived to be predominantly responsible for ensuring fair play.

These data support the general picture outlined in terms of professional players' fair and sporting conduct. A clear majority of rugby spectators also supported the view that rule-bending is not acceptable. However, it should be noted 28% of rugby union spectators and 23% of rugby league spectators agreed that it was OK for players to "bend the rules". By way of comparison, the highest equivalent response in the first phase of the research came from football spectators, just 14% of whom said that rule-bending was acceptable. These results are further reflected upon in the ethos section below.

1.7 External Influences on Sporting Conduct

While it is crucial to consider players' conduct in the context of the game, there are a range of other factors which significantly affect their conduct and also alter spectators' perception of that conduct. Questions were asked regarding the increase of money into professional sports, the use of new TV technology, and media coverage of foul play, to ascertain the perceptions of these influences.

- Approximately one third (league 28%; union 33%) of rugby spectators thought that increased money in the game had led to increased cheating, while the majority (league 59%; union 50%) thought there had been no change. The rugby union figure is more interesting given the recent advent of formal payment for performance to professional players.

In relation to TV technology and media coverage:

- Spectators had very positive perceptions of the idea that the increased use of TV cameras, slow motion replays and still shots had a positive effect on fair play (league 63%; union 73%). Approximately one quarter (league 28%; union 22%) thought it had no effect.
- The majority of rugby union spectators (50%) thought that media emphasis on foul play was 'too much' whereas only 6% thought it was too little. While nearly one third (30%) thought it was 'too much' in rugby league, nearly half (42%) thought it was 'about right' and nearly one quarter (24%) thought it was 'too much'. There are clearly different perceptions of the reporting of foul play in the different samples.

1.8 The Ethos of Sports: Comparing and Contrasting Rugby Spectator Attitudes

The following data attempt to clarify spectators' attitudes to the ethos of their sport. They specifically address key behaviours such as holding players down after the tackle or leading with the forearm into the tackle situation in rugby league, and stamping and punching in rugby union. The rugby union sample registered more ambivalent responses in respect of borderline tactics and violent play than did the rugby league sample:

- Nearly three quarters of the rugby league spectators (71%) thought holding the player down after the tackle was not acceptable.
- While the majority of rugby union spectators (60%) thought that stamping on players who were deliberately preventing release of the ball was unacceptable, a significant minority (37%) thought it was acceptable.
- Nearly all league spectators surveyed (91%) thought that leading into the tackle situation with the forearm was unacceptable.
- While a clear majority of rugby union spectators (78%) thought that punching another player in certain circumstances was unacceptable, a significant minority (18%) thought it was acceptable.

1.9 On the Use of Technology to Help Officials Make Fair Decisions

- Nearly all rugby league spectators (92%) thought that the use of video evidence to establish whether a try had been scored should be used in all professional games
- Nearly all rugby union spectators (88%) thought that video evidence should be used in the awarding of tries in the professional game.

1.10 Demographics

The samples of both surveys were not fully representative of the wider population. The gender balance of the sports spectator surveys comprised three quarters men, one quarter women. The age profile of the two samples was notably different. The rugby league sample had a mean age of circa 30 years while the rugby union sample was circa 36 years. Interestingly, in the 15-24 years range, the rugby league sample was almost double the rugby union sample whereas in the 45+ years it was almost half of the rugby union sample.

1.11 General Concluding Remarks

There are two striking factors in these surveys. First, there is considerable overlap in perceptions and attitudes of both sets of spectators. Secondly, the rugby league sample is almost homogeneous in all its views.

It is clear, though, that there are some trends worthy of comment. It would be inappropriate to draw strong general conclusions about the moral health of either of the sports surveyed on the basis of this evidence alone. It can be said, however, that there is a general perception of an improvement in the standards of conduct of players in rugby league and less clearly in rugby union. This trend is mirrored in spectator perceptions of player/official relations. There was significant minority acceptance of rule bending in both codes. There is a strong perception of the unacceptability of certain unprofessional tactics such as holding down and leading with the forearm in rugby league while stamping and punching in rugby union received significant minority support.

These findings, like any other, will partly be a function of the time and place they were taken. The proximity and high profile of a punching incident involving the then England Rugby Union captain is likely to have had a bearing on the perceptions and attitudes of the rugby union respondents, which it is impossible to estimate with any precision. Moreover, the extent to which these perceptions are well-informed is a matter of debate.

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Section 2:

Research Aims, Design and Method

2.1 Introduction

There is a growing concern - articulated through the media, sport representatives and the public - that the 'conduct' of sportsmen and women, that is, their behaviour, practices and norms when playing and competing in sport, is deteriorating. In order to gain a more objective appreciation of this concern it is important to develop a sense of spectators' wider perception of values in sport and sporting conduct. This project, however, is focused on the UK public's perceptions of the values and norms of sporting conduct in two high-profile professional sports: rugby league and rugby union. It is complemented in section seven, as appropriate, with comparisons of data from a previous survey on cricket, football, golf and tennis.

2.2 Research Aims

The research seeks to achieve the following aims:

- To examine whether rugby spectators think that sporting conduct as currently demonstrated by professional players in rugby league and rugby union is positive and relates to some ideal notion of the 'ethos of sport' and the 'spirit of the game'
- To examine whether rugby spectators think there has been an improvement, decline or no change in the ethical standards of the two codes (inside and outside of competition)
- To examine rugby spectators views on the impact of new technologies on the values and norms of the two codes
- To provide contextual data about public perceptions in these respects for further examination within the 'Valuing Sport' initiative

2.3 Research Design

Two spectator-specific populations were surveyed (n=416) at prestigious rugby league and rugby union events that form a part of what might be called the 'British sporting calendar'. The survey was based on questionnaire method.

The original questionnaire was devised by Dr. Mike McNamee with assistance from Dr. Carwyn Jones and in close collaboration with the UK Sport Strategy, Ethics and Research Team (SEARCH). It was then developed specifically in relation to a UK public survey and to those surveys for cricket, football, golf and tennis undertaken in summer 2001, and then to the rugby surveys undertaken in spring 2002. The rugby league and rugby union questionnaires were piloted with individuals knowledgeable about both codes of rugby.

2.4 Method

The spectator survey data were collected by a team of researchers from the Leisure and Sport Research Unit at the University of Gloucestershire and the SEARCH team. The composition of the questionnaire is indicated below:

- (i) Generic perceptions of/attitudes towards sporting conduct (all surveys questions 1-10);
- (ii) Media coverage of foul play (question 11);
- (iii) Ethos questions (specific to each sport surveyed: questions 12-15);
- (iv) Use of technology in awarding tries (question 16)
- (v) demographic data (questions 17-23 in rugby league, 18-24 in rugby union):
 - (a) age range
 - (b) sex
 - (c) activity frequency
 - (d) sports TV viewing frequency
 - (e) region of domicile
 - (f) knowledge of rules of sport spectator.

The questionnaires themselves attempted to capture the most significant portions of sporting conduct. In close consultation between the principal investigator and the SEARCH team the following topics or axes were agreed to form the basis of the individual questions.

- (1) Ethos (players' respect for officials);
- (2) Ethos (effects of technology on performance and officiating);
- (3) Norms and values (responsibility for fair and foul play); and
- (4) Norms and values (cheating/rule-bending/fair play).

Some words of explanation are required of these terms. By 'ethos' is meant the relatively shared set of informal rules of conduct that govern the behaviour of sportspeople. The tacit component of this idea is partly captured in the common phrase 'the spirit of sport'. It is the contention of the research to examine whether the ethos of each sport is unique or whether the 'spirit of sport' can be taken as a universal idea. The particular aspects of sports ethoses that the research investigates relate to players' respect for officials and the effects of technology on performance (playing equipment) and to assistance to officials (i.e. video back up) to make key live-time decisions in the sports. By 'norms and values' is meant the personal and social orientations of the sports and of the players themselves. In particular, the research investigates ideas such as dis/respect, cheating, deception, gamesmanship (sic), and fair play as they are perceived to be displayed by rugby spectators. Where a Likert Scale was used for questions it incorporated 5 points from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. For the purposes of ease of presentation, the data range responses were collapsed to three: 'agree'; 'neutral', and; 'disagree'.

The following provides more details of the line of questioning which was used round each of the four axes in relation to the generic (omnibus) and sport specific (spectator survey) samples.

2.4.1 Stage One

Before revising the questionnaires used in the previous study, the principal investigator had meetings with professional and ex-professional players and coaches to determine the relevance and significance of the ethos-related questions. A set of pilot interviews was conducted at different locations with those who had a 'good knowledge' of one or both rugby codes. The pilot probed the efficacy of the questions in order to tease out issues of ambiguity and miscomprehension.

2.4.2 Stage Two

The second stage of the research is the spectator survey. This involved conducting 416 face-to-face interviews with spectators representing both rugby codes at the following sporting events:

- the Rugby Union Six Nations fixture between England and Wales at Twickenham on 23rd March 2002; and;
- the Rugby League Challenge Cup Semi-Final matches between Wigan and Castleford at Leeds on 13th April 2002, and St Helens and Leeds at Castleford on 14th April 2002.

Assuming daily crowds between 15,000 and 70,000 this gave +/-5.4 to +/-7% confidence level at 95%. The survey was conducted by the Leisure and Sport Research Unit, University of Gloucestershire, and representatives of the Strategy, Ethics and Research Team (SEARCH) of UK Sport.

2.4.3 Stage Three Feedback and Dissemination

After all surveys were completed, Jerry Bingham (Head of Strategy, Ethics and Research, UK Sport) and Dr. Mike McNamee presented a summary of the data to representatives of the respective Governing Bodies (i.e. International Rugby Board; Six Nations Committee; Rugby Football League). This was to inform them of the data and the analysis thereof and to ascertain their interpretation of it. It was also, importantly, to begin to develop a shared agenda with these sports in order to help them improve the ethical standing of their sports – not least of all, in the eyes of their spectators.

Section 3:

Demographic Details of Rugby League and Rugby Union Spectator Survey Data

3.1 Introduction

Before the questionnaire data are analysed in detail, it is useful to consider the make-up of the sample. This section sets out demographic comparisons between the studies that will form an important background to the detailed responses that follow in the following sections. Some very general trends are observed that will be commented on with respect to the inter-code variations below.

It is important to note that the survey team was, at each match, instructed to approach a representative sample of spectators relative to the perceived age and gender profile of the crowd. Their success in achieving this, however, cannot be underwritten by official statistics from the respective National Governing Bodies.

Where significant trends emerge in relation to gender, age, sports TV viewing, knowledge of the rules, or social grouping, they are observed here.

3.2 Gender profile

Sport/Gender %	Male	Female	Total
Rugby League	85	15	100
Rugby Union	82	18	100

Table 3.1: Gender profile of rugby spectator sample

The gender profile of the rugby spectators surveyed is consistent with the samples from cricket (89% male), football (80% male) and golf (75% male). Only the tennis sample (52%) came near to reflecting the gender profile of the UK public as a whole. Given rugby league's image as a family spectator sport, their gender profile may be queried. There is, however, no definitive data to set against this figure to corroborate or undermine it.

3.3 Age Profile

Sport/Age %	15-24 yrs	25-44 yrs	45+ yrs	Total	Mean
Rugby League	23	57	20	100	c30
Rugby Union	11	52	37	100	c36

Table 3 2: Age profile of rugby spectator sample

An interesting set of differences emerges in relation to the age of spectators surveyed. While both samples peak at the mid-range, the rugby union sample had higher proportion of older spectators than the rugby league sample. The mean age of the rugby league sample was equal lowest (with football) across the sports while rugby union was equal second highest (golf = 39). The age profile of rugby union in particular, is interesting when set against certain responses to the ethos-specific questions in section 5 below.

3.4 TV Viewing of Sport

Sport/TV Viewing (%)	High frequency	Low frequency	No viewing	Total
Rugby League	77	22	1	100
Rugby Union	64	35	1	100

Table 3.3: Sport TV viewing profile of rugby spectator sample

Key: High frequency = 'almost every day' or 'every two or three days'; Low frequency = 'once or twice a week' or 'less often'

We can say here that a clear majority of rugby spectators are high frequency viewers of TV sport: more than three quarters of rugby league and nearly two thirds of rugby union spectators being high frequency TV sports viewers. We may infer from this that respondents had a strong interest in sports.

3.5 Frequency of Participation in Sporting Activities

Sport/Frequency of Participation %	High	Medium	Low	Total
Rugby League	36	20	44	100
Rugby Union	31	34	36	100

Table 3.4: Participation frequency of rugby spectators

Key: High = at least twice a week; Medium = at least once of month; Low = Less often or never

What is interesting here is that despite their older age profile, rugby union spectators have a higher frequency of participation. What is also noteworthy is the near identical activity-to-age profile of football and rugby league whose spectators were the least active despite having the lowest age profiles.

3.6 Rugby Spectators' Knowledge of Sports Rules (Laws)

Sport/Knowledge of Rules %	Good understanding	Average understanding	Poor understanding	Total
Rugby League	72	25	3	100
Rugby Union	60	33	7	100

Table 3.5: Rules knowledge of rugby spectators

We can conclude that both sets of spectators surveyed had a good understanding of the rules (or 'laws' as they are referred to in both codes of rugby). Rugby league registered the highest response of all sports surveyed. What is noteworthy though, is the relative complexity of the 'laws' of both sports. In contrast to rugby union, the structure of the game of rugby league is less complex. This is manifest not merely in the number of 'laws' but in their 'complexity'. Nonetheless, we can infer from the demographic data above that the spectators surveyed have a reasonably strong interest in their sport and that their responses cannot easily be dismissed as those of 'outsiders'.

Section 4:

Presentation of Rugby League and Rugby Union Spectator Survey Data

4.1 Introduction

This section discusses the similarities and differences in the responses of rugby league and rugby union spectators. Although the issues selected were designed to have some relation across all of the sports surveyed, the specific ethos questions (13-15, or 14-16 in the rugby union survey) naturally vary between sports.

4.2 Question 1: fair and sporting conduct

*‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
In general, professional rugby league / rugby union players act in a fair and sporting way when playing sport’*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	88	6	6	0	100	213
Rugby Union	89	5	6	0	100	213

These figures represent an overwhelming endorsement of the view that professional rugby players of both codes play their sports in a fair and sporting way. Only golf (92%) spectators presented more positive general perceptions of their players' conduct. Moreover, when comparing these figures it is important to bear in mind that while golf is a parallel contest, both rugby codes are not merely interactive tests but incorporate – within the rules – a high degree of physical contact that is often of a very aggressive nature. Their endorsement of fair and sporting conduct within that context then is doubly noteworthy.

4.3 Question 2: conduct over the last 10 years

‘In your opinion, has the sporting conduct of professional rugby league / rugby union players generally improved, declined, or stayed about the same over the last ten years or so?’

	Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	58	16	24	2	100	213
Rugby Union	41	23	32	4	100	213

In comparison to question 1, this question addressed the same perception though over a period of time. Rugby league spectators were clearly the most positive in their perceptions of improved player conduct over the last ten years. This figure reflects moves over recent years by the RFL to improve standards of conduct on the field. The development of a robust and efficient disciplinary system is likely to be central to this perception of conduct improvement and is worthy of comment. Video recordings

of all Super League matches played on weekends are analysed for foul conduct by mid-day Monday when a disciplinary meeting takes place to see whether a player has a case to answer. If the meeting decides this is the case the player will come before a disciplinary hearing that will deliberate on and conclude the matter on the following day.

In rugby union, on the other hand, the development of a citing policy in relation to foul play has attracted considerable (though potentially biased) negative attention for being inefficient (in terms of the time taken), unjust (players cited and proven to have acted illegally have often incurred penalties in excess of those which might have resulted from incidents dealt with by referees in the course of the game) and inconsistent (different panels have approached similar conduct with greater or lesser lenience and sanctions). Whether these perceptions exist in fact is, of course, beyond the scope of the study. In response to these perceptions, and bearing in mind the close proximity of the survey to the advent of ‘formal’ professionalism in rugby union (by which is meant the explicit payment for sporting performances), the positive response of 41% of rugby union spectators is significant. Stated differently, despite the advent of formal professionalism and the misgivings had by many traditionalists that this might corrupt the game, only 1 in 4 spectators surveyed thought that player conduct had declined over the last 10 years. The positive (if tentative) endorsement is, however, supported by the age profile of the spectators themselves. If the negative views of traditionalists were to be verified, one might reasonably have expected negative responses from older respondents. Despite the older age profile of the rugby union spectators, only a quarter thought conduct had declined over the period.

A final cautionary note must be made here. It must be borne in mind that perceptions of improvement or decline of sporting conduct over time (even if they were completely objective) would be a hostage to the baseline perception. A sport may have had exceptionally poor standards of conduct that had improved to the merely miserable and still returned a positive response to this question. The high “improvement” figure from rugby league spectators should not, of course, be taken simply to mean that its standards of conduct were miserably low 10 years ago, though the point must be borne in mind.

4.4 Question 3: respect for officials

*‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
In general, professional rugby league/rugby union players show respect for the referees when playing sport’*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	74	9	16	0	100	213
Rugby Union	87	7	6	0	100	213

As with Question 1, the levels of positive endorsement here are very high. Nearly three quarters of rugby league spectators and nearly nine out of ten rugby union

spectators felt that the players showed respect for the officials. Only golf (90%) scored higher. As with the discussion of responses to Question 1, it is necessary to bear in mind the structures of the activities when comparing the data. The mode of interaction, however, will govern whether players' conduct is seen as respectful or not. In addition, player-official relations are compounded by the tempo of the game (i.e. the speed of the game and in particular the frequency and duration of breaks within play), the mode of interaction with other players (i.e. the directness of competition and the possibility of interpersonal contact), and the traditions of official-player interaction. The rugby findings here can be contrasted with the football survey, where only 24% of respondents agreed that players were respectful toward officials. The traditions of both rugby codes have incorporated ethoses where discipline in relation to physical contact (because of its direct and aggressive nature) is extremely important and can be seen as a more general part of overall player discipline which is shown in relations with officials. As we shall see below, spectators are less positive (or certainly more equivocal) about other aspects of discipline in contact situations such as stamping and punching.

In rugby union there is a widespread myth – nonetheless evidenced in the *actual* behaviour of players – that the captain is the only person entitled to talk to the referee about rulings for given decisions. It is interesting to note that the IRB have decided to formalise this convention in response to their perception that it may be coming under some threat. This year they will be re-emphasising the importance of the protocol in writing to their member federations.

4.5 Question 12: disputing the referee's decision

*'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
Disputing the referee's decision is common in professional rugby league / rugby union'*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	43	10	46	0	100	213
Rugby Union	29	8	62	1	100	213

In light of the previous responses, where rugby spectators registered very positive perceptions of players' respect for officials, when asked a more specific question their responses were very noticeably less positive. There appears to be a trend, though a tentative one, for spectators to record more positive responses to general questions. When the question is more focused on discrete behaviours it is less positive. The extent to which this greater negativity is a function of the question wording, or the nature of the behaviours themselves, is not clear. What is clear, however, is the ambivalence of the rugby league spectators towards professional players, with 43% agreeing and 46% disagreeing that disputes are common. This view was most strongly held by the youngest age group (15-24 years).

In rugby union, on the other hand, nearly two thirds of spectators surveyed disagreed, and less than one third agreed, that player-official dispute was common. This appears

to lend some weight to those who would argue that allowing all players to communicate with the referee over decisions would represent the “thin end of the wedge”. Whether or not this erodes the informal communications between players and officials – which might well be viewed by both players and officials alike as critical to the health and flow of the game - remains to be seen.

4.6 Question 4: respect for officials over the last 10 years

‘In your opinion, has professional rugby league / rugby union players’ respect for the referee generally improved, declined or stayed about the same over the last ten years or so?’

	Improved	Declined	Stayed the same	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	25	28	44	3	100	213
Rugby Union	25	22	49	4	100	213

Having noted the contrast between both the rugby surveys in perceptions of decision disputes by players, it should be observed that rugby spectators of both codes were ambivalent about whether players’ respect for officials had improved or declined over the last 10 years. The highest response in each code indicated a perception of *status quo*. Equally, it might be said that around seven out of ten spectators in each code thought that players’ respect for officials had improved or stayed the same over the period. The spectators of both codes responded in very similar ways to this question. Despite the slightly less negative view of decline in rugby union, still nearly a quarter of all rugby union respondents thought that player respect for officials had declined. This again would appear to add weight to the IRB initiative about captain/referee communications. Interestingly, a significant gender difference emerges across the surveys: women are more likely to think that respect has stayed the same while men are more likely to think that players’ respect for officials has declined.

It is worth noting, in contrast with the other sports, that nearly three quarters (73%) of football spectators surveyed thought that players’ respect for the referee had declined over the period whereas only 5% of the sample thought that it had improved. Cricket spectators registered an even lower figure (4%) of spectators who thought players’ respect for the umpire had improved.

4.7 Question 5: rule-bending

*'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
It is ok for professional rugby league / rugby union players to 'bend the rules' when competing in their sport'*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	23	8	68	0	100	213
Rugby Union	28	10	62	0	100	213

In this table we see a clear majority of spectators supporting the view that rule-bending is not acceptable. Again, however, we may emphasise the alternative data point that approximately one quarter of spectators from both codes think rule-bending in the professional game is acceptable. Two points need to be borne in mind here. First, this latter figure is clearly higher in the rugby codes than those registered for all the other sports surveyed. In rugby union, the younger the spectator the more likely they were to agree with the proposition. This fact requires explanation beyond that which can be inferred from this survey alone. Irrespective of age, one might point to the relative number and complexity of rules but, though that might partly explain the rugby union datum (28% of spectators agreed that rule-bending was acceptable in the professional game), it would seem less likely to explain the rugby league datum (23% agreement). This fact would have to be set against that other rule-dominant game in the survey, golf, whose respondents were the least tolerant of rule bending behaviours (91% of golf spectators disagreed that rule-bending was acceptable).

Secondly, the rule-bending perception is representative of a general category. More precise data would be needed to fathom, particularly, which rules were or were not acceptable to bend. If we take rugby union as an example, it could be said that rule-bending in relation to offside encroachment, or crooked feeds into the scrum might be one thing, whereas front rows whose shoulders drop below hip-level or tacklers pushing the limits of borderline/high tackling might be quite another. Technical rule-bending may be seen as effective gamesmanship, though even here there is considerable ambiguity, whereas more dangerous infringements might be seen as straightforwardly unacceptable conduct. The recent incident involving Leicester's Neil Back at the final scrum of the 2002 Heineken Cup Final is a clear example of the difficulty of drawing the line. It was in the dying seconds of that game that Back (the then England captain) caused a furore by handling the ball in a scrum to deny Munster the opportunity of scoring a match-winning try. The responses of many professionals, including some of those involved in the match, was notable. They seemed to place the action beyond blame as if it were an acceptable tactic which, though illegal, was still "legitimate". Whether the rugby union fans who indicated that rule-bending was acceptable would have proffered a different view had the research taken place after, rather than before, this incident, can only be a matter for conjecture. While the respondents were knowledgeable about the game, these more fine-grained attitudes must be critically evaluated in terms of those populations more closely aligned to the ethos of the professional game (players, coaches, officials, administrators).

4.8 Question 6: rugby players as role models for children

*'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
In general, professional rugby league / rugby union players are good role models for children'*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	89	7	4	0	100	213
Rugby Union	83	11	6	0	100	213

Across the sports spectator surveys, very positive responses were recorded when spectators were asked whether professional players provided good role models for children. Only football scored below 70%. This trend is continued across both rugby codes. Rugby league scored the highest response of all the sports surveyed with nearly nine out of ten respondents agreeing with the proposition. This datum may perhaps be explained by the idea that rugby league teams enjoy closer relations with their communities by contrast with other national sports such as cricket, football, golf or tennis (see also Question 7 below). The figure of 83% agreement in rugby union is also important when one considers that the survey immediately followed the long-running and high profile media debate about the banning of Martin Johnson (then England captain) for punching (see also Question 11 below). Part of the debate revolved around the responsibilities of an England captain precisely as a leader and role model. It should be noted, however, that female respondents in the rugby union sample were more positive than males in their responses and that this difference was a significant one. The fact that the sample was so male-dominated should make us careful of reading too much into this datum but makes it worthy of further investigation elsewhere. The figure of 83% may then be viewed as a particularly strong endorsement of players' capacity to act as good role models.

At the request of the Six Nations, a further set of questions developed the perceptions of good role-modelling in rugby into a question about the choices of parents, and hypothetical choices of non-parents, as to whether the game provided the kind of activity that they would be happy for (their) children to participate in.

4.9 Question 7: parents' willingness for children to play rugby

'Thinking as a parent with children...or...If your children were still of school age...or...if you were a parent...how much do you/would you agree or disagree with your children taking up and playing rugby league / rugby union nowadays?'

Before presenting and discussing the data, it is necessary to understand the demographic profile. While 59% of rugby union spectators surveyed were parents, only 44% of rugby league spectators surveyed were parents.

	Parent (with school age child/children)	Parent (with past school age child/children)	Non-parent	Total	N=
Rugby Union	34	25	40	100	213
Rugby League	28	16	56	100	213

These data are important to remember when attempting to gain an overall picture of the spectators' willingness for children to participate in either of the rugby codes. A final remark is also required for the following table. Due to errors in the collection of this data point, a number of responses had to be discarded. The total number of responses to this question (alone) falls to 199 for rugby league and 191 for rugby union.

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total%
Parent (school age)	98	0	2	0	100
Parent	96	0	4	0	100
Non-parent	92	4	2	2	100
N=	185	3	2	1	199

While the role-modelling question elicited high degrees of positive responses, the rugby league spectators registered almost total endorsement of the sport in terms of their (potential) children's involvement in the sport. This fact begs further investigation that is beyond the scope of this study. As was noted above, however, it may be due to the particular geographical and cultural composition of the audience and of the game itself. The density of the game in terms of active spectating and participation is located predominantly in the north of England. In rugby league, a certain sense of communal identity is present, it is tentatively suggested, between fans, clubs and players which is now less evident in football, where the previously tight bonds between urban locations and their sporting representatives in the clubs has been lost. In endorsing the role-modelling potential of rugby league, and in indicating their strong approval for the game in terms of their willingness for their (potential) children to participate in the game, rugby league spectators are of course endorsing their own sense of self-worth and identity. It should be noted that, among the other sports spectator surveys, only the football group participated in the survey as fans of a particular club (in contrast to the individual sports of golf and tennis, and the national support of the England cricket team). This simplistic reading might, however, be challenged when we consider the very similar data from the rugby union survey.

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total %
Parent (school age)	95	2	3	0	100
Parent	98	0	0	2	100
Non-parent	98	2	0	0	100
N=	185	3	2	1	191

In this table we again see the near total endorsement of a sport in relation to the willingness of parents for (their) children to participate. While a majority (56%) of the rugby league sample is comprised of a non-parent population, nearly six out of ten of the rugby union sample were parents (a third of whom had school age children). We may suppose then that the views of the rugby union spectators are more to be relied upon since they are more the responses of actual parents rather than hypothetical ones.

4.10 Question 8: responsibility for ensuring fair play

'It is sometimes argued that coaches, players and officials have responsibility for ensuring fair play in sport. In your opinion, who has the greatest responsibility for ensuring fair play in professional rugby league / rugby union?'

It will be clear that while players will have a certain amount of responsibility for fair play, the perception that spectators have of coaches and officials is likely to vary according to the nature of their role (and the expectations of them) in the different sports. In team sports the role that the coach plays often extends beyond technical matters to cover issues such as the laying down of standards of personal conduct, the 'tone' of a team, the development of a team ethos and so on³.

	Coaches	Players	Officials
Rugby Union	2.07	2.45	1.67
Rugby League	2.04	2.26	1.89

What is most interesting about this table is the ranking of perceived responsibility for ensuring fair play. In each case, players are clearly perceived as having the greatest responsibility for ensuring fair play, while coaches are second and officials thought to be least responsible. What must be added to this picture is a frame of reference to other sports.

³ It should be noted that psychologists often refer to a similar idea as the 'motivational climate'. This concept, however, is more limited than the idea of a moral atmosphere or moral tone that is being suggested here.

	Coaches	Players	Referees/Umpires/Officials
Cricket	1.76	2.70	1.60
Golf	1.45	2.69	2.02
Tennis	1.68	2.49	2.14
Rugby Union	2.07	2.45	1.67
Football	2.15	2.38	1.64
Rugby League	2.04	2.26	1.89

From this perspective we can see that rugby league players are perceived to be least responsible for fair play when set against the other player groups. It is not surprising, of course, that players in the team sports (excepting cricket) received a lower ranking than in the individual sports. Moreover, professional footballers lie in between the two rugby codes and, importantly, rugby officials from both codes were perceived to be more responsible for ensuring fair play than were football officials. What is also noteworthy is the high perception of rugby coaches' responsibility for ensuring fair play which is, collectively, second only to football and markedly higher than the other team sport; cricket.

It is therefore a moot point as to whether the idea of professional responsibility has been perceived as having any developed meaning in professional rugby. Of course, these data only indicate perceptions. This particular factor is one of the more urgent spaces for potentially furtive further investigations for the improvement of sporting conduct. It will also be important to probe, in further research, the role that the coach plays in laying down the tone or ethos of a team in relation to fair and foul sporting conduct.⁴

4.11 Question 9: money and cheating

'In your opinion, has the increase of money in professional rugby league / rugby union led to an increase, decrease or no change in the amount of cheating that occurs in the sport?'

	Increase	Decrease	No change	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	28	4	59	8	100	213
Rugby Union	33	9	50	8	100	213

The history of the two codes of rugby is littered with issues of payment for performance. The idea of broken-time payments, where players were compensated for their loss of earnings while playing rugby in the pre-professional era, is often cited as being the key factor that drove a wedge between the two codes. In any event, rugby league has, in this sense, been a 'professional' game for considerably longer than rugby union.

⁴ It should also be noted that these data are presented according to a different formula, that alters slightly the precise data – though not the overall relations - of the previous 'Sporting Conduct' report.

It might be surprising, then, that just over a quarter of all rugby league spectators surveyed felt that the increase in money in the game has led to an increase in cheating. The perception need not correspond to an actual increase in total revenues of the game (whether to satellite or terrestrial TV monies or indeed other sources) for it to be of note. While one of the traditional arguments against professionalisation of rugby union was that payments would induce or exacerbate a win-at-all-costs mentality, 50% of rugby union spectators surveyed appeared to think that this was not the case and that there had been no change in this regard. One third, however, thought money had increased cheating. It is worth noting that a significant gender difference emerged in the rugby union data with women more likely to say there had been no change and men (who had a generally greater self-reported knowledge of the laws) more likely to say that the increase in money had brought about an increase in cheating. It would be interesting to examine data concerning yellow and red cards in recent years (or sendings off in years before) to attempt to corroborate the veracity of this perception. This would provide one (albeit crude) measure of the effects of professionalisation. Former players have, anecdotally, remarked at the decrease in violence in the new professional era, though this view, too, stands in need of proper investigation.

4.12 Question 10: effects of TV technology on fair play

'In your opinion, has the use of more TV cameras, slow motion replays and still shots increased, decreased or had no effect on the level of fair play in professional rugby league / rugby union?'

	Increased	Decreased	Had no effect	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	63	6	28	3	100	213
Rugby Union	73	2	22	3	100	213

Of all sports surveyed, both codes of rugby registered easily the strongest positive response to the effects of TV technology on fair play. Nearly two thirds of the rugby league crowd, and nearly three quarters of the rugby union crowd surveyed felt that the use of more TV cameras, slow motion replays and still shots had increased the level of fair play in their sports. In terms of rugby league, it may be difficult (or perhaps simply too early) to look at this figure in isolation from the conscious effort made by the RFL to improve conduct within the game. The use of TV technology may be an effective tool here. This research cannot conclude this, of course, but strong responses such as this one beg further questions as to why a given sport spectator crowd think that this has been the effect.

With respect to rugby union, the suggestion could be made that, given the game's inherent complexity (and the significance of multi-player contact situations such as rucks, mauls, lines out and scrums), TV technology can spot infringements that the officials may be unable to. The relations between TV technology and the different disciplinary systems of both codes is an aspect too that merits further investigation. This is predominantly the case since the mere presence of TV technology will not

improve the conduct of players on its own. Everything may hang on when and how the technology is used and by whom. The utilisation of TV technology, for example, may cause its own problems. In football there has been critical discussion of the use of in-stadium replays of violent conduct, and questions have been raised as to whether this may incite violent crowd behaviour. Irrespective of this, there is clear (though implicit) spectator endorsement of the effect of TV technology in improving player conduct.

4.13 Question 11: media emphasis on foul play

'In your opinion, does the media place too much, too little, or about the right amount of emphasis on foul play in rugby league / rugby union?'

	Too much	Too little	About right	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	30	24	42	4	100	213
Rugby Union	50	6	42	4	100	213

Nearly half of both rugby league and rugby union spectators agree that media emphasis on foul play in their sports is about right. Only football spectators registered lower 'about right' responses to this question (and then by only 2 percentage points).

Interestingly, there is a significant split between the 'too much' and 'too little' responses. A significant minority (24%) of the rugby league respondents thought that there was too little reporting of foul play. When we set this statistic alongside the very positive perceptions of player conduct generally, we obtain a clear picture of the extent to which rugby league spectators are not accepting of foul play.

In rugby union a more defensive pattern of responses emerges. This point will be reinforced in the following questions. Half of all spectators thought that there was too much emphasis by the media on foul play. This figure is easily the highest of all the sports spectators surveyed (in fact it is more than double the figure from golf and tennis). On the one hand, one must bear in mind the timing of the survey in relation to the Martin Johnson affair (see also Question 6 above) The ethos of rugby union, along with the disciplinary systems of the game, came under considerable critical scrutiny as a result of this episode. These high profile discussions are highly likely to have had an effect on spectator responses to the question. To dismiss the figure upon these grounds alone would be unjustifiable, however, when the rugby union responses to the ethos questions are presented below. Rather, it can be suggested that there may be a certain culture of permissible violence or foul play in rugby union – and a sense among spectators that the media do not understand or appreciate their game. Again, the survey cannot probe these questions, nor can too much be drawn from single data points. There is, however, clearly an issue to be investigated here among the insider communities of professional rugby union.

4.14 Question 13 (rugby union only): emphasis on defensive strength

'It has been suggested that the game is now less entertaining since the skills displayed by the players seems to be overshadowed by the physical nature of the game.'

*To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement:
The emphasis on defensive strength is changing the game for the worse'*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby Union	28	11	55	5	100	213

The Six Nations Committee specifically requested this question. It reflects a recent trend in the media to compare the two codes of rugby and, in particular, to examine the influence on rugby union of coaches recruited from rugby league. There has also been a suggestion that rugby union is now more physical than ever before. Many statistics have been put forward to show that players are bigger, heavier and stronger than at any other time in the game's history. The question assumed the truth of these propositions, without distinguishing them explicitly, and sought to report the perceptions of spectators as to whether this trend was positive or not. While a significant minority agreed that the game was changing for the worse because of the emphasis on defensive strength, almost twice that figure disagreed. The concerns, frequently expressed in the media about this trend, are not borne out therefore in spectators' perceptions as a whole though there are significant differences among the age groups. The youngest age group most strongly disagreed with the proposition whereas, in general, the older the spectator the more likely they were to agree with the idea that the emphasis on defensive strength was changing the game for the worse.

Section 5:

Presentation of Data on Ethos Issues Specific to the Rugby Codes

5.1 Introduction

Questions 13-15 in the rugby league survey, and questions 14-16 in the rugby union survey, attempt to interrogate the respondents' attitudes towards the ethos of their sport by examining key issues that are particular to that sport. Specifically, they attempt to tease out the strength of informal fair play; the non-written rules of behaviour that are a product of the traditions of the sports. While a given ethos may be more or less morally acceptable, it may well incorporate more or less good or bad behaviour as part and parcel of the ethos. Although spectator responses to general questions about sporting conduct may be generally more positive or negative it does not follow that their responses to very specific features of the game or conduct therein will be necessarily the same.

Because of the structural and cultural differences of each sport it is impossible to map coherently the same questions. What may be said most generally is that what is central to the ethos of one professional sport may be peripheral to another. Notwithstanding the differences that exist between different sports and their particular ethos, an attempt has been made, however, to pair up similar items so that a cross-sport analysis can be tentatively made. These groupings are under the following headings:

5.1.1 Unprofessional/Professional Tactics

There are few so-called professions that have in their vocabulary a term such as 'professional foul'. While understanding what behaviours the term refers to, the idea of calling them 'professional' is oxymoronic. The term refers to strategic fouls that seek to elicit a lesser disadvantage to one's team than playing by the rules and allowing a potentially worse effect. These questions (rugby league = questions 13 and 14; rugby union = questions 14 and 15) relate to the manner in which players and teams will take advantage by engaging in sharp practices in each of the sports.

5.1.2 Technology and Good/Fair Sport

The manner in which technology affects sports varies widely. In these questions, the effect of technology in encouraging players to play fairly was investigated in relation to both rugby codes (question 15 in rugby league; question 16 in rugby union). This is termed Technology and Good/Fair Sport.

5.1.3 Sporting Conduct: Most Important Issues

The final question of the survey, excepting demographic data, concerned the issue of the future of good and fair rugby. Respondents were asked to identify the issue they felt most important in terms of the ethics of their sports. If no answer was forthcoming a response of nil was recorded since a failure to identify a key issue was in itself an important indicator of the moral health of the sports.

5.2 Unprofessional/Professional Tactics

Question 13 (rugby league): holding down after the tackle

*‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
Holding someone down immediately after a tackle is an acceptable tactic in professional rugby league’*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	19	8	71	2	100	213

This question was selected partly because the tactic it refers to is relatively widely practised across many levels of the sport, not merely at the professional level. Nearly three quarters of all those surveyed disagreed that the tactic was an acceptable part of the game, although almost one in five thought it was. These data might be taken to sanction strong attitudes by referees to players who deliberately wish to slow down the game in order to gain better defensive re-alignment. On the other hand, a significant minority merely thought that “holding down” was part and parcel of the game. This question should be read in conjunction with question 14 of the rugby union survey.

5.3 Unprofessional/Professional Tactics

Question 14 (rugby union): stamping

*‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
Stamping someone who is deliberately preventing the release of the ball is an acceptable tactic in professional rugby union’*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby Union	37	4	60	0	100	213

Before discussing the importance of this data, it is necessary to make some remarks about the structure of both codes, and in particular the differences of illegal techniques to slow the ball down, and the attacking team’s responses to it. First, the nature of play in both codes is different in terms of continuity. Understanding the tackle component of both codes is crucial here. When a rugby league player is held in the tackle situation, the referee will call “held” to end that phase of play and the players restart by heeling the ball back in an uncontested manner. In rugby union, the contact situation is neither so brief nor so clear cut. When a player is tackled (i.e. brought to the ground and held) the ball carrier must immediately play the ball, or release it, and roll away. It is not uncommon for the tackler who must also release the tackled player and roll away, however, to attempt to prevent the release of the ball in order to prevent the attacking team maintaining continuity of play – and thereby to increase the chance of gaining an optimal defensive arrangement. The referee, upon

seeing the act, should award a penalty and take further action against repeat offenders (individual or team). Nevertheless, in close contact situations the referee can easily miss offences. One response to this illegal tactic has been to stamp (i.e. bring the foot down in a vertical direction) on the offending player. It is thought by some players to be natural justice and/or a means of preventing the player repeating the act. It is, however, outside of the laws of the game.

The idea, then, that nearly four out of ten supporters thought that stamping was an acceptable tactic raises certain questions. Although the data here are presented on a shortened Likert Scale (i.e. the ‘strongly agree’ and ‘disagree’ figures are added to the ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ responses respectively), women spectators were more likely to strongly disagree than men. Additionally, the strongest responses came from the extremes of the age categories. The youngest group (15-24 years) were most likely to strongly agree, while the oldest group (65+ years) were most likely to strongly disagree.

There is a commonly held view that rugby league has less medium term stoppages (i.e. scrums take less time, there are no lines-out, there are no mauls – where the ball is contested by both sides after the ball carrier has been held in a group of players rather than on the floor) but less flow (because of the lack of time between the short stoppages at the tackle and the restarts that necessarily occur thereafter) that is important to understand here. Because of the stoppages that occur if the ball cannot be quickly moved away from the tackle area, there is often a large tactical incentive for the tackler to cheat and prevent release. While the fact that as many as 37% of rugby union spectators agree with the proposition that stamping in these circumstances is an acceptable tactic warrants further investigation, our interpretation of it cannot determine whether the stamp is a direct response to the prevention of ball-release or whether it is out of a violent motivation to harm an opposition player.

5.4 Unprofessional/Professional Tactics

Question 14 (rugby league): leading with the forearm into the tackle

*‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
Leading with a forearm into the tackle situation by the ball carrier is an acceptable part of the game’*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	5	3	91	1	100	213

A not uncommon practice by professional rugby league players has been to lead into the tackle situation – while protecting the ball - with the forearm. Whether this is an offensive measure intended to intimidate the opposition or actually harm them (and therefore deter opponents in future tackles), or whether it is for protection, is a moot point. Subtle distinctions can be drawn about the height of the forearm, its angle, and whether the elbow leads. Notwithstanding these subtleties, nearly all spectators felt

that this was an unacceptable part of the game. We may infer, tentatively, that spectators felt it was an unacceptable intimidatory or violent action.

5.5 Unprofessional/Professional Tactics

Question 15 (rugby union): punching

*‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
In certain situations, punching is an acceptable part of the game’*

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby Union	18	4	78	0	100	213

We have previously noted the idea that, potentially, the ethos of rugby union may incorporate some acceptance of violence. While more than three quarters of the sample disagreed that punching was acceptable as part of the game, a significant minority – nearly one in five – agreed that, in certain situations, it was. It is important to note that there was not a significant gender difference in their responses. This in itself may be connected with a host of other issues to do with aggressive masculinity and the acceptance of domestic violence that are not commented upon here. The strongest responses, however, came from the extremes of the age categories that are consistent with the patterns of responses to the question about the acceptability of stamping. The youngest group (15-24 years) were most likely to strongly agree, while the oldest group (65+ years) were most likely to strongly disagree. It is important not to read the ‘agree’ datum naively. It is certainly open to interpretation. On the one hand, we may read it alongside the data on rule-bending (see Question 5 above). On the other, we may read it alongside the data on stamping and suggest that there may exist in rugby union a potential culture of permissible violence. Yet another way of reading the datum might be to suggest that it is part of the culture of rugby union not to tolerate technical (and other) infractions and for players to take the law into their own hands. We must bear in mind that the respondent must decide in their own mind precisely which ‘certain situations’ they consider to condone punching. The survey does not interrogate these interpretations. As with the stamping and rule-bending questions, these data offer pressing cases for further research with the ‘insider’ communities of professional rugby.

5.6 Technology and Good/Fair Sport

Question 15 (rugby league)

*‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
It is preferable that video replays are used to help referees make decisions about the
awarding of tries in **all** professional games (i.e. not just live televised games)’*

Table 5.5 (%)						
	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby League	92	0	7	0	100	213

The difficulty rugby officials have in making good decisions is due in part to the time-compressed nature of action. Moreover, the sheer speed and variety of play, found not only in both codes of rugby but similarly in football and (to a certain extent) cricket, is exacerbated by the directions that play can take. It is perhaps not surprising then, that the figures in tables 5.6 and 5.7 correspond so closely.

It should be noted that there is a minor, though significant, difference in the wording of this question among the rugby surveys. All televised professional rugby league matches have an element of video refereeing. Some TV spectators infer that all professional rugby league games have this element but it is in fact not the case. The question therefore captured spectators' responses as to whether this practice should be extended to cover all professional rugby league games. The response was almost totally in favour. It could be argued that the current practice entails some inequality: that games between teams that are perceived to be more interesting to TV viewers are the beneficiaries of fairer, more precise, officiating. It could also be argued, of course, that judgements still need to be made by referees – with or without the presence of video assistance. Either way, there was a near total backing for the use of video support in all professional rugby league games.

5.7 Technology and Good/Fair Sport

Question 16 (rugby union)

*‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
It is preferable that video replays are used to help referees make decisions about the
awarding of tries’*

Table 5.6 (%)						
	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total	N=
Rugby Union	88	4	8	0	100	213

Like the rugby league respondents, there was an extremely high positive response to the use of video replays to assist in the awarding of tries in professional rugby union. It should be noted, however, that nearly one in ten spectators disagreed. It should also be noted that a significant age difference again emerged in response to this question in

rugby union but not rugby league. This response is interesting in the light of recent decisions that have used the video referee and still been a matter of subsequent dispute (e.g. Dan Luger’s winning try for England against Australia in November 2000). The younger age groups were more likely to strongly agree while the older age groups were more likely to strongly disagree. Notwithstanding those controversies, and the more general points raised above, the rugby union respondents very strongly favour the use of such technology.

It is worth examining this point in relation to a similar question being asked across football and cricket sports surveyed with respect to key decisions in their sports.

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Total
TV replays should be used to help referees make decisions about awarding penalty kicks in football	63	3	34	0	100
Video/third umpires should be used to settle lbw decisions in cricket	54	8	38	0	100
It is preferable that video replays are used to help referees make decisions about the awarding of tries (rugby union)	88	4	8	0	100
It is preferable that video replays are used to help referees make decisions about the awarding of tries in all professional games (rugby league)	92	0	7	0	100

Nearly two thirds of all football spectators agreed that TV technology should be used by referees to help in decisions about penalty kicks. Just over one third disagreed. Similarly, though slightly less strongly, over half of cricket fans (54%) agreed while just over one third (38%) disagreed. While showing significant agreement, we should note the greater predominance in both rugby codes (by comparison to golf and tennis) of the use of new TV technology in officiating. It may be the case that perceptions of the spectators in the rugby surveys are being led by the greater use of these techniques and technology in their sports. Whether officials would agree with their perceptions is another matter and is an area for further research. It should not be assumed that increased fairness alone would drive these perceptions.

5.8 Question 16: Sporting conduct: most important issues

Spectators were asked the following open-ended question at the end of the interview:

‘What do you think is the most important issue concerning sporting conduct in professional rugby league/rugby union at the moment?’

The most significant observations were:

Rugby league

Referees (quality, consistency, players relations with)	38%
No issues / Don’t know	30%
Fair play / foul play	15%

Rugby union

‘What do you think is the most important issue concerning sporting conduct in professional rugby union at the moment?’

Fair play / foul play	22%
Referees (quality, consistency, players relations with)	14%
Professionalism / Role models	12%
No issues / Don’t know	9%
Violence	9%
Negative media coverage	8%

We can see that three factors were significant across both codes. The first of these relates to referees (whether in terms of the consistency of decision-making, their quality more generally, or players relations with them). Nearly four out of every ten rugby league supporters cited this as the biggest problem related to their sport whereas nearly one in seven union spectators thought this was the case. Significant minorities thought that foul play, or the lack of fair play, was the most important issue (22% in union and 15% in league). This was clearly the most significant issue for rugby union spectators. These figures are very close to those recorded for similar samples in football (25%) and cricket (16%). What is notable is that nearly a third of all rugby league spectators surveyed felt that there was no single pressing issue while only a tenth of all union spectators took this view. This supports the remarkable homogeneity of the rugby league responses but also points to a wider range of perceived issues facing rugby union.

Section 6:

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Summary Conclusions and their Relations to the Other Sports Surveyed

Taken as a whole, the rugby spectators project shows a very positive perception of sporting conduct among professional rugby players of league and union codes. The remarks below summarise the surveys and situate them in relation to the previous surveys conducted in cricket, football, golf and tennis.

There are strong similarities across the range of questions asked in both rugby surveys. Nearly all rugby league (89%) and rugby union (88%) spectators felt that professional players in their sports acted in a fair and sporting way. These figures are slightly higher than the mean of all other sports surveyed. This generally positive perception of players' conduct was supported by spectators' views about change in standards of conduct over the past ten years. 58% of rugby league spectators and 41% of rugby union spectators considered that players' conduct in the respective codes had improved over this period. Only 16% of rugby league spectators and 23% of rugby union spectators thought that it had declined. Again, this picture is generally more positive than the other sports surveyed with the exception of tennis.

Another key way of assessing the spectators' perceptions of the values and norms of sporting conduct was to interrogate their view of the manner in which players interacted with officials. Much has been made in recent years of the deterioration of players' conduct in this regard across a variety of sports. Both rugby codes return more positive responses than all other sports surveyed with the exception of golf. Interestingly, rugby league spectators' responses relating to the respect players show towards officials (74%) is not as positive as their general endorsement of fair and sporting conduct. Rugby union registered an almost identical response to the previous player-conduct question. When the question regarding officials was asked within a ten year time frame there was a very similar distribution of responses: approximately half said that players' respect for officials had stayed at the same level while a quarter said it had declined and a quarter said it had improved. Only golf, again, registered more positive responses in relation to perceptions of the frequency with which players disputed referee's decisions.

In terms of rule-bending, both surveys elicited a significant minority of acceptance. Around a quarter of both samples said rule-bending was okay. This is much higher than in the other sports surveyed. It prefigures some interesting responses to the ethos-specific questions.

Respondents from both surveys gave very positive responses (higher than 80%) about the role modelling of professional players from both codes. Only golf, among the other sports surveyed, gave a similarly positive picture. Moreover, there was almost total endorsement by supporters for the idea that they would be willing for their children to play the respective sports.

Despite this high rating, an interesting pattern of diminished responsibility for players to ensure fair play in the game was observed. In each code, players were rated only marginally above coaches in this regard. Of players in all the sports surveyed, rugby

league and rugby union players were thought to be the least responsible for ensuring fair play.

In terms of the external influences on sporting conduct we can examine responses that attempted to connect issues of money, TV technology and media reporting to fair and foul play. The majority of spectators from both rugby surveys felt that the increase of money into their games had not led to an increase in cheating. Significant minorities thought it had led to more cheating but both rugby league (28%) and rugby union (33%) fared favourably in this respect in relation to the other sports surveyed (only golf spectators were less likely to think that money had increased cheating). Similarly, the majority of rugby league (73%) and rugby union (63%) spectators felt that new TV technologies had increased fair play.

Significantly, in relation to the reporting of foul play, differences emerge between the two rugby codes. It is notable that although the same proportion of spectators considered the level of such reporting to be 'about right' (42%), half of all rugby union spectators thought it too much, while a quarter of rugby league fans thought it not enough. These figures should be set against the significantly more positive perception of a maintenance/improvement of standards in rugby league as opposed to rugby union. At the same time, they are at odds with the perception that rugby league players dispute referees' decisions with more frequency than their rugby union counterparts. Whichever interpretation is offered here, rugby union spectators were significantly more likely than any other set of spectators to think there was an over-emphasis on foul play in the reporting of their sport.

Much has been made of the use of new technology in key decision-making areas by referees. Both rugby surveys registered strong endorsement of this idea. Nearly all rugby union respondents felt that video referees should be used in the awarding of tries in the professional game, whereas nearly all rugby league respondents thought that its practice should be extended to all professional games in rugby league. These figures are much higher than for the cricket and football surveys in which similar questions were asked.

In terms of the ethos of rugby league, two questions were raised regarding what might be termed un/professional tactics. Leading with the forearm by the ball carrier into the tackle situation, and holding a player down subsequent to a tackle (both common practices in the professional game), were thought to be unacceptable (71% and 91% of rugby league spectators took this view respectively). In contrast, attitudes towards un/professional conduct in rugby union were much less strong. Nearly 20% of rugby union spectators thought that punching in certain situations was acceptable, as did nearly 40% about stamping on a player who was deliberately preventing release of the ball. Examined in the context of the data on rule-bending and the responsibility of players for ensuring fair play, these figures raise some troubling issues about what might be regarded as a culture of permissible violence in rugby union - especially among younger sections of the spectators.

6.2 General Trends in Demographic Factors

It should be noted first and foremost that there was considerable homogeneity in the responses of rugby league spectators. Few statistically significant differences were found across the entire survey. The rugby union sample elicited a greater variety of responses by comparison.

6.2.1 Gender Profile

Only one significant difference emerged in the rugby league sample in relation to gender, which also occurred in the rugby union sample. Female spectators in both codes were more likely to agree that players' respect for referees had stayed the same where as men were more likely to think it had declined. In addition, the rugby union sample gave rise to several other interesting differences which, in summary, indicate a slightly more positive view among female respondents regarding the sporting conduct of professional rugby union players. Women were more positive than men in relation to players being good role models for children. Women were also more likely to say that increased money in the game had not led to a change in cheating in the game and that stamping was not an acceptable part of the game.

6.2.2 Age Profile

In the rugby league sample, only question 12 (concerning whether players' commonly disputed the referee's decisions) elicited significant age-related differences. The youngest age group were more likely to perceive such disputes as being common than the rest of the sample. In rugby union, several significant age-related differences were noted. First, it was the middle age-categories (35-44; 45-54 years) who were most likely to consider that disputing the referee's decision was common in rugby union. Secondly, younger respondents were more likely to agree that it was okay for professional rugby union players to bend the rules. Thirdly, the older the respondent the more likely they were to feel that the emphasis on defensive strength was changing the game for the worse. Fourthly, the youngest grouping (15-24 years) were most likely to strongly agree that stamping on a player preventing release of the ball was acceptable whereas the oldest group (65+ years) were most likely to strongly disagree. Fifthly, the same pattern was found in response to the question whether punching was acceptable in 'certain situations'. Finally, younger spectators were more likely to endorse the use of video referees to assist in the awarding of tries.

6.3 Limitations

As with the previous UK Sport research on spectator perceptions of sports professionals' conduct, two important limitations need to be recorded. First, the research cannot guarantee the representativeness of the samples. Secondly, whether or not the responses themselves are "informed" responses can be validated only by the self-assessment of the spectators (see table 3.6). If we trust these figures, then we can

reasonably assume that their responses are based on a sound knowledge of the games concerned.

6.4 Recommendations

A number of key issues arise from the research which would benefit from further research and policy development.

The most important issues relating to the rugby league survey were about perceptions of refereeing competence and of relations between players and referees. Given that poor officiating is unlikely to produce good rugby, there is scope for bringing together focus groups of the respective populations (separately and jointly) to explore common and unshared perceptions of what triggers disputes in relation to the ethos and formal laws of the games. At the same time, across the sports surveyed, the research has uncovered much good practice that could and should be widely shared. A cross-sport forum for officials (not merely in terms of rugby) was suggested by the RFL in the feedback meeting with them and seems an excellent way forward.

The high rating that was given to coaches' responsibility for ensuring fair play suggests that greater research is necessary into the shared norms of coaches with respect to ethical issues. Developing confidential and anonymous research into player preparation, motivation and performance strategies with respect to 'rule bending' and borderline tactics might help develop an objective foundation for Governing Body discussions about ethical issues. The notion of exploring players' self-perceptions of their professional responsibilities should go hand in hand with this research. There was a perception that the RFL had more successfully challenged violent conduct and foul play than had the rugby union authorities as a whole – aided perhaps by the geographical proximity and relatively strong cultural identity of the rugby league clubs. When combined with the relatively high spectator acceptance of certain types of violent conduct in the union code, further research is warranted into the cultures of rugby at elite (and perhaps sub-elite) player and coach levels.

The clear endorsement of increased technology to help officials make decisions should give the Governing Bodies cause for thought. In particular the idea that fair decisions are more important than the spirit of the game (incorporating the authority of the officials) is one that warrants further discussion and cross-sport fertilisation. Moreover, the effect of TV technology in actually increasing fair play is also something that should be addressed. It is worth noting, however, that the media's presentation of foul play can have negative effects according to how matters are handled. With respect to rugby union, in particular, there is a strong perception that the media tend to overblow these issues. Whether or not this is the case, there is clearly room for the development of a forum that could shape future debate as to media coverage of controversial flash points.