

HARLEQUIN AMATEURS MINI AND YOUTH COACHING PHILOSOPHY

This document explains **Harlequin Amateurs** philosophy behind coaching rugby to your children. It is a fundamental part of the ethos of the club and key to our ongoing success.

The clubs ultimate goal is to:

“Develop Great Players Who Love Rugby”.

Child-centred development is how we will reach this goal. We believe in taking a long-term view of each player at the club and by encouraging our children to enjoy the sport, learn more about it, themselves and their team-mates they will grow as both rugby players and people. We will ensure our kids ‘love’ rugby throughout their childhood and continue playing it as they become youth players in their teenage years and on into adult life.

Our ‘Approach’ to the development of our young players is aligned completely with the RFU directives on how clubs should coach rugby to children and with certain ‘rugby realities’:

- Younger children principally play sport to have fun and to be with their friends
- Winning does not rate in a child’s top 5 reasons for playing rugby
- Children mature physically and emotionally at different stages right up until their late teens
- All players who commit themselves to the club should expect to have the opportunity to develop as players and to enjoy the sport
- Fifteen a side Rugby teams need players with differing physical, mental, technical and tactical abilities
- Some children understand and enjoy contact rugby sooner than others
- To make successful youth teams (U13 upwards) we need 35+ players all with the attributes needed to be great players

(*) At the end of this document we have included exactly what the RFU want to encourage clubs like ours to do for children in rugby.

Our philosophy is to ensure that

- Kids enjoy themselves
- We provide child-centred coaching
- Each individual develops their physical, mental, technical and tactical rugby abilities
- We retain a long-term view of all players who are committed to the club

What is our coaching philosophy?

Recognising that all children develop at different rates and in different ways and creating a process to ensure each individual improves at their own speed is the backbone of our coaching philosophy. The player who was the fastest or biggest in U7’s will be overtaken by smaller kids who never saw the ball at that age by the time they are teenagers.

Our approach relies on the concept of **not** streaming children in the early years for the purpose of winning festivals and fixtures. It is fundamental that our process is driven from the perspective

of individual development and not of the age group or parent’s or a few children’s competitive aspirations in these early years.

However, it is important to recognise that non-streaming doesn’t mean we don’t do some training in ‘ability groups’ where it is useful to meet the developmental needs of the individuals. What it does mean is this ‘ability matching’ doesn’t become the defining moment for the group; we are not grouping children into A, B, C and D groups at a young age.

Part of the art of coaching is to discreetly match the groups for coaching purposes from time to time, but to still ensure every player has a great experience and the age group still feels like one group. If the lead coach believes it will be beneficial to the age group, players may be matched by ability in parts of training sessions with **the express purpose of ensuring each individual receives the intervention, input and appropriate level of challenge for their developmental stage.**

Why are we doing this?

The main reasons Harlequin Amateurs are delaying selection and streaming is to make sure we achieve our goal of ‘developing great players who love rugby’.

This means:

- Delaying the selection of streamed teams will facilitate the development of more and better players for youth rugby. This is supported by guidance from the RFU and the principles of Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD).
- Focussing more on enjoyment and skill development in the early years and less on selection of one individual child as being better than another will lead to more players staying in the sport and having the chance to develop the necessary skills to become great and competitive players at a later stage in their lives - Remember rugby is a late-developing sport so the more kids we can retain during childhood the more successful they, the team and the sport will be moving forward.
- Specific reasons for delaying selection and streaming of players are to wait until
 - they have matured physically, emotionally and mentally
 - the natural difference in ability based on autumn vs summer births (potentially 12 months between the youngest and the oldest) have been minimised. As has the massive differences in weight, height and mental maturity.
- It is far better to develop young players who desire to get better at the skills necessary for rugby rather than those who are principally focused on whether their team won or lost. Results will naturally follow when teams and individuals develop their skills to a high level.



What does this mean for the club?

This approach dictates that as a club we delay selection and streaming

- We will not select A and B squads until U12 (except occasionally where the enjoyment and safety of the kids is a factor ie. when we are entered into Festivals that stipulate an A or B or C team must be played).
- Training will never be streamed even when A and B teams need selecting (although we will ability-match groups for certain parts of training as outlined above).
- Even after the start of selection and streaming at U12, the emphasis will remain on the process of player and skill development. There will still be easy and regular movement between A and B groups in practice and in matches wherever practical having regard to the fact that players will continue to develop at different speeds.

How Harlequin Amateurs measures success?

Individual improvement

We judge the success of the club by the improvement in each individual player but this is not just based on their rugby playing development in terms of their physical, mental, technical and tactical abilities but also on the **Core Values of Rugby**:

Teamwork
Respect
Enjoyment
Discipline
Sportsmanship

Club and Team success

Mini teams U7-U12

- We place limited emphasis on team performances in festivals and competitions in the early years where success can be achieved by selection of those who show advanced development and playing a style that ensures victory but excludes the majority of kids on the pitch and does not encourage long-term development or enjoyment of the game.

From U13 however we do start to measure the club by the success of its teams as well as individual growth.

- We put a high value on team success at youth level (U13+), where the players will be more mature physically and mentally and will have benefitted from our entire coaching Pathway. This is where competition and winning - all the things parents think about - come to the fore. And because we have been patient and built strong foundations within our mini squads, our youth teams will comprise exceptionally grounded and talented all-round rugby stars...

Age Group Specifics

U5/U6 - Quins Play

Provide a fun and safe environment for our very youngest members to start developing a love of team sports and the basic skills and attributes necessary for playing them.

U7/U8 - Quins Learn

Provide all U7s and U8s with the same opportunity to develop the skills and attributes needed to be competent athletes and rugby players.

U9/U10/U11 - Quins Contact

Provide all U9s –U11s with the opportunity to develop the attributes needed to be great rugby players whilst recognizing that some will develop more quickly than others in their ability to master the requirements of contact rugby and the other technical skills being introduced. It may be easier to work in smaller groups of similar ability from time to time to master these new aspects of the game, such as tackling, scrummaging, rucking, mauling, line-outs and kicking.

U12 - Quins Contact Plus

Start to introduce the U12s to the concept that results matter in a more formal environment and to prepare them for next season's step-up to Youth Rugby. Start to compete as A and B teams in tournaments and in league matches.

We will still recognise that they are developing in their technical and tactical skills and it may be easier to work on particular attributes in smaller groups of similar ability from time to time.

U13-U18 (Youth) - Quins Explode

Youth teams compete in highly competitive leagues and league team selection is based on a host of criteria including positional ability, skill, teamwork, leadership and fitness.

However, it is important that all players are still provided with the opportunity to develop the attributes needed to be great players as there will still be a considerable variation in physiological development in youth teams and players may still not be in their final positions yet. Coaches should continue to recognise that the key to success at youth level remains skill development and player retention. Coaches should encourage players to enjoy the process of improvement and gaining skills rather than be too focused on league outcomes. Sessions must still be enjoyable and player centered.

Individual players will have personal development plans based on their skillset and personal objectives. High ability players will be encouraged to take trials for county and academy rugby.

* The RFU would like all clubs running Mini and Youth rugby sections to:

- Provide a progressive player pathway that will enhance the way in which our players are developed in a more incremental manner

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- Provide a game which is in line with the principles of Child Development based on extensive research and expertise
- Increase involvement of all players
- Emphasis on competitive performance not competitive outcome
- Encourage less structure (encourage skills and discourage fear of failure)
- Make the game easier to understand and referee
- Less emphasis on contact and more on continuity in early years
- Rewarding intention to tackle in early years as much as ability to tackle

The express aim being to develop an improvement in young players' skills and higher levels of retention into the adult game.

To achieve the above we must acknowledge:

- For children under the age of 12, there should be limited focus on structure and drills
- Children learn best by doing and acquire most of their skills by playing small sided games with limited rules and regulations
- Important building blocks (learning) of decision-making and skills can be optimally developed from the age of 7 onwards, and have a lasting effect throughout a player's future
- Reducing numbers (via small-sided games) is a way to increase involvement and provide more opportunities for each individual to be involved in decision-making scenarios
- Children do not need the sort of structures, rules and rituals associated with adult games. Younger children should have limited structure imposed upon them and learn skills within these constraints
- Profound inequalities in body size during 7-18 years of age mean that a game heavily focused on contact and set-pieces encourages a "bigger is better" mentality from a very young age, rather than skilled play and decision-making
- More structure needs to be added as children develop into adult forms of the game
- Contact skills are a vital and characteristic feature of Rugby Union and the acquisition and practice of these skills is essential. However in order to provide emphasis on ball handling, evasion & support at younger ages, contact will not become a defining part of the game. It is not suggested that contact should be devalued, only that children will be encouraged to look for space and support before going into contact

Responsibilities

We aim to set very high standards when it comes to taking responsibility for ourselves (the coaches), parents and players at Harlequin Amateurs.

COACH RESPONSIBILITIES

- To develop in all players an appreciation of rugby.
- To develop each player's maximum potential, including personal and social qualities.
- To encourage and deliberately boost the confidence of all players.
- To never ridicule, belittle or knock the confidence of a child.
- Ensure each coaching session is well prepared with the coaching emphasis being placed on the development and acquisition of skill, decision making and an understanding of the game.
- Maintain the highest standards of personal discipline and courtesy during matches irrespective of the result and be a perfect role model for the young people.
- To try, wherever practical, to become as well educated as possible through Coaching courses, CPD sessions and reading as much about coaching as you can. Your goal is to ensure the kids receive the very best coaching that you can provide them.

PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

- Set an example to your child.
- Applaud good play by your team and by members of the opposing team.
- Be friendly to parents of the opposition.
- Do not question publicly the referee's decision.
- Support all efforts to remove verbal and physical abuse from mini and youth rugby.
- Recognise and value the importance of coaches.
- Do not force an unwilling child to participate in rugby, their enjoyment is paramount.
- Encourage your child to play by the Laws/Rules.
- Teach your child the importance of effort and teamwork.
- Help your child to improve skills and to learn a positive attitude to the game.

PLAYER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Play Rugby within the Laws and the Sporting Spirit of the Game.
- Support and cooperate with fellow team members to ensure the team plays to its maximum capability.
- Respect the opposition without whom the match would not take place.
- Respect the referee and accept all decisions without dissension.

