

**CHOOSE  
RESPECT  
SPORTSMANSHIP  
DISCIPLINE  
TEAMWORK  
ENJOYMENT**

# **SHAPING THE GAME**

**A Guide for Parents and Coaches**

Introducing Children  
Retaining Players  
Developing Talent



[rfu.com/shapingthegame](http://rfu.com/shapingthegame)



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## INTRODUCTION

**As parents we all wish to see our children enjoying themselves, getting involved in activities and developing as people. Shaping the Game is a pilot project taking place in three counties; Durham, Hampshire and Warwickshire, with the express aim of increasing all of the enjoyment, involvement and development elements.**

The project is based on research evidence and recommendations made by the University of Exeter, commissioned by the Rugby Football Union.

The core values of the Rugby Football Union of **Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline, Sportsmanship** remain central to development of the game. However the fall in numbers from the mini and youth

The Principles of the project are

- 1 The Child First
- 2 Maintain rugby as a game for all shapes and sizes
- 3 Increase enjoyment
- 4 Increase involvement
- 5 Retain Players

This pamphlet describes briefly and simply how this will be done, but more

information can also be found on the following link:  
[rfu.com/shapingthegame](http://rfu.com/shapingthegame)

### Putting children first

Children are not young adults and require a good deal of nurturing, care and guidance as they travel through the formative years and beyond.

This appears to be an obvious statement, and thankfully the vast majority of parents and adults adhere to this. However there are times when adult rules, expectations and views are imposed on children with the best intentions, but possibly not always with the best outcomes.

This is particularly evident in sport, and rugby is no exception. The RFU continuum rules to which rugby is played in England from under 7 to under 12 age groups have been in place for 20 years and have not been significantly revised since then.

Although they were considered to be forward thinking and innovative in 1990, the needs, experiences, expectations and aspirations of children, like everything else, have changed since then and the continuum was due for a review.

**“Small sided games also assist by increasing involvement of the individual. The fewer players there are, the more involved they are, either in attack or defence”**

game (235.4 thousand) to participating adults (72.5 thousand) suggest that things are not quite as they should be. There are a range of reasons for this and many sports suffer from significant drop out, however there is no room for complacency.

Shaping the Game relies on research evidence and child development expertise to put the child at the centre of development, using rugby as the tool. This includes inclusion, the gradual introduction of new rules, a simplified game, and a focus on growing confidence and self-esteem. The development of the person goes hand in hand with the development of the game.

Rugby Union is a great game, and that is why we are all involved in it, whether we are players, coaches, parents, spectators, referees or volunteers. **enjoyment** is key to retaining people in the game longer.

Children naturally play, explore and discover. Leave them on their own and they will invent activities and games, or perhaps play existing ones without any adult supervision. It is only recently in developed countries, that childrens' activities have been largely supervised by adults.

This research by the University of Exeter has shown that in the large part, children under the age of 12 should receive limited focus on structure and drills, as children learn best and gain more enjoyment by doing and taking part. They gain most of their skills by playing small sided games with limited rules and regulations.

Small sided games also assist by increasing **involvement** of the individual. The fewer players there are, the more involved they are, either in attack (ball carry, passing, receiving, supporting) or defence (tackling, running, supporting). This has been standard practice in coaching sessions for many years, but often inter club/school games have more players participating, but it is questionable if they are all involved.

To enable players to learn and develop it is essential they have opportunity to practice, not just in coaching sessions but also in games. By simplifying the rules (less start/stop and more continuity/activity) and reducing the numbers, involvement will be increased in the core elements of the game.

By increasing involvement through playing small sided games and gradually increasing new rules, elements and tactical situations, children will develop their **game understanding**. They will be able to identify where space is, how to create it and utilise it. They will become more aware of simple tactical ploys building to the more complex ones. Moreover, they will be able to create, explore and discover for themselves.

will be provided with more **decision making** opportunities- when, where, who, how, what, why. rty

More touches of the ball, support, running and activity will also aid and hasten **skill development**. Children practice to play, and it is little wonder that some children enjoy practice more because they touch the ball more. The new rules provide a greater chance of players being involved more frequently, touching the ball more often, making decisions regularly and developing skills continually, all of which will increase enjoyment and assist with the long term **retention** of players in the game.

## THE RULES

### Under 7

This is an introduction to rugby at the earliest years, and as such should be a simple & easy to understand game with minimum intervention from the referee. Children are not penalised for attempting to catch the ball, but dropping it (knock-on). Smaller pitches and simpler rules mean more pitches and more players playing.

Current	Pilot
7-a-side	4-a-side
Coach allowed on pitch	Referee as coach,
Knock-on penalised	Knock-on not penalised
60m x 30m pitch	20m x 12m pitch

### Under 8

Increasing the numbers by two, to provide more of a team “feel” whilst maintaining the principles of low numbers and increased involvement. The players are able to go to ground to score – which introduces the element of contact with the ground

Current	Pilot
7-a-side	6-a-side
Coach allowed on pitch	Referee as coach can
no going to ground	go to ground to score
60m x 30m pitch	45m x 25m pitch

### Under 9

The tackle is a skill which requires a good deal of coaching, encouragement and confidence building. It is the only new element introduced for this age group so that it can be coached safely and effectively. However it is also recognised that some children lack confidence. The intent to tackle is rewarded, with the tackle being redefined as a grip on the ball carrier below the arm-pit. This enables confident players to continue to tackle low and less confident players to hold on and contribute to the defensive effort.

Current	Pilot
9-a-side	7-a-side
Introduction of: Tackle, Ruck, Maul, Scrum, Lineout	Introduction of the Tackle Can go to ground to score
60m x 35m pitch	60m x 30m pitch

### Under 10

This age group is introduced to the scrum in order to develop tactical awareness for all players. It also sees the first stages of competition for possession with the ball carrier, tackler and one from either side able to compete for the ball in the tackle area.

Current	Pilot
9-a-side	8-a-side Introduction of
Introduction of: -competitive Scrum -competitive Lineout (early specialism) 60m x 35m pitch	competition for the ball -mini maul -mini ruck scrum (nearest 3 players) 60m x 35m pitch

### Under 11

The Under 11 rules will be finalised once the Under 10 season is underway in 2011/12. This will enable the U10 rules to be observed and any unforeseen problems addressed. However, rules will be introduced in line with the underlying principles of child development.

