

Rugby Season at The Pilgrims' School

Friday, 4 November 2022 at 18:30

Dear parents,

On Monday 28 November we make the shift from football to rugby. Understandably, this often raises questions about player safety about which I hope to reassure you.

At its heart, rugby is a running game of catch and pass. The RFU have worked to layer the learning of the game year by year to cope with its technicalities. In Reception and Year 1, pre-rugby years, we will be engaging in functional movement skill, catching and passing, running and evading. In Years 2 and 3, we play TAG rugby, a non-contact version of the game. In Year 4, we introduce the tackle in what is, effectively, a rugby league style, tackle only game. In Years 5 and 6, the ruck and maul are developed, with uncontested 3-man scrums. In Year 7, the scrum remains uncontested, but the hookers may contest the strike. In Year 8, there are no flankers, but the scrum becomes contested. Throughout, there are no line outs nor kicking for points.

The game we see on the television today is not the game our players play. As such, and exciting as it is, unfortunately, the modern game doesn't provide a useful shop window into the game in prep schools. Rugby in the prep school remains a game for all shapes and sizes. The amateur era of rugby provides a more comparable example of the kind of rugby our schoolboy players might aspire to - with modern safety implications.

In preparation for this season, staff will have undergone concussion and tackle safe training. The pupils will have plenty of lead in time to re-engage with rugby activities, before an initial fixture on Saturday 3 December.

As well as scaffolding our learning through the age grades in the contact game, the RFU have developed Touch Union; a non-contact version of the game and X rugby; a reduced contact format. Using these and by applying other conditions, our Games staff can adapt the skills of the game to the abilities of our pupils to go at their pace, from contact to non-contact, and stages in between. In fixtures with other schools, matches could take the form of contact, touch - or a conditioned version as necessary to enable all pupils to enjoy playing.

Officiating, appropriate practices and use of the *Activate* conditioning programme all combine to prevent concussion. Should a player receive a head injury, then they would be placed on the Graduated Return to Play protocol, ultimately to be signed off by a health professional. Concussion has become synonymous with rugby; however, head injuries can occur in many of the sports we engage in and even in recreational activity. With all these measures, we seek to prevent and minimise the risks.

Plenty of senior schools which our pupils exit to play rugby in the Christmas term, so it is important that the pupils gain some useful experience.

As well as mouthguards, there is a growing plethora of equipment that may be used for rugby. <https://keepyourbootson.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/RugbySafe-Essential-Guides-and-Templates-2022-23.pdf>

Hockey

For many years at Pilgrims', the 2nd half of the Lent term was devoted to hockey in the senior years. Hockey has since moved away from being played on grass pitches. We don't have modern facilities at Pilgrims' to easily accommodate hockey but, initially, it remained open as a non-contact alternative for some in place of rugby in Years 7 and 8 and has been played on our Grid. This later evolved to a free choice but its popularity then restricted its access to only Year 8. In an attempt to solve this issue and maintain hockey as an option, I envisaged moving it to the PE programme, where scheduling allowed us to access the astro at Winchester College, from Year 3 to Year 8. Unfortunately, the astro has been dismantled to make way for a new boarding house. This means that for this year, then, those Year 8s who played touch rugby last year may choose to participate in hockey, but thereafter, we will aim to play rugby across all years, both contact and non-contact forms. Meanwhile, we will keep our eye on the new astroturf, in the planning stages at Kingsgate Park, Winchester College with the hope that this will enable us to return to playing hockey in future, as part of our PE programme.

If you have any questions, please get in touch.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Short

Director of Sport