

A Letter to Rugby Parents

So, your son or daughter has decided to play Rugby? **DON'T PANIC!** Rugby is a wonderful game, with a rich tradition around the world. It is the contact game of choice for countries such as England, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, France, Scotland and Wales. Throughout the world people play Rugby from grade school through adulthood. In fact, Rugby is truly a "Life Sport" because, unlike American-Football, players continue to participate in the Rugby game long after they leave school. Players continue playing competitive rugby for years and years by joining local men or women's clubs. Senior Clubs even have "Old Boys" teams composed of players over 35 years of age! This letter is intended to help you understand the game of Rugby a little better, and give you some information about those that play it.

Some other Rugby players you may have heard of: President Bill Clinton played at Oxford; Newt Gingrich's sister, Candace, plays for the Washington Furies; Pope John Paul played for Poland; Darren Nelson, former Minnesota Viking, played at Stanford; Ted Kennedy played at Harvard; Boris Karloff founded the Southern California RFU; Jim Baker played at Princeton; actors David Niven and Richard Harris played Rugby both on and off the screen; Sean Connery played school-boy rugby! These and many, many others are part of the Rugby community!

Rugby is definitely a "contact" sport, but it is not a brutal sport. In fact, it is much less violent than American Football. There are several very good and logical reasons for this including the fact that contact, while vigorous, is much less dangerous than in American football since neither blocking or rigid protective equipment is allowed in Rugby. This means players are not getting 'blind-sided' by the unexpected blocker nor striking each other with 'armored' shoulders and helmets. Also, dirty or dangerous play is not tolerated, and the offending player may be ordered off the field or even suspended by his club or the local league. Rugby places as much importance on sportsmanship as on winning. Here are some other reasons rugby compares favorably with football:

Possession: Rugby is a game of possession, not yardage. Therefore coaching emphasizes passing the ball before being tackled as well as other skills aimed at keeping the ball in your teams possession, and not struggling ahead trying to gain a few more yards while the opponents entire team tries to drag you down.

No Blocking: (Surprise) Most think a lack of blocking makes the game more dangerous, but the fact is it makes rugby safer because defenders are not being blind sided by some sprinting lineman hoping to open a hole in the defense (and in the defender!). In football space is created for a runner by brute force (blocking). In rugby space is created by guile and cunning (passing the ball and using misdirection). In Rugby, nearly all collisions between players is anticipated by both, and therefore better prepared for.

(3) Tackling: (Surprise part deux) Tacklers must wrap their arms when tackling. No 'rolling body block' type tackles aimed at an opponent's knees are allowed. Also, **NO** tackling is allowed above the shoulders. Also known as 'high tackling', it is strictly forbidden and quickly penalized if it occurs. This not only makes for safer play but for surer tackling. Coaches teach not only how to tackle but how to be tackled (i.e. how to fall so that your team keeps possession of the ball).

Finally, the Rugby community is a unique group of individuals (and a group of unique individuals) who dare to try something different... a legendary game that mixes strength, speed and agility. A game that will forever welcome athletes of any and every size and shape. Successful rugby does require fitness, but first and foremost it requires that special person who's ready, willing and able to give it a go.

"Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. You have to win it."

Ralph Waldo Emerson