

RUGBY CONTINUUM REGULATIONS 2007/08

INTRODUCTION

1. Definitions

For the purposes of these Continuum Regulations, the definitions set out in the section marked “Definitions” shall apply.

2. Values

2.1 All Clubs are encouraged to provide facilities for the playing of youth rugby. Special care must be taken to honour the RFU/RFUW Policy and Procedures for the welfare of young people in Rugby Union. It is recognised that youth rugby costs money and that, inevitably, much burden will fall on clubs. The RFU will do all in its power to assist. It is hoped Constituent Bodies will strive to do the same and that every opportunity will be taken to seek assistance from Sports and Local Government Councils and other sources of revenue, income or funding that are available. However, the youth and Mini section of a Club must at all times be the responsibility of the Club and under the close supervision of the Club Committee. Care should be taken over under-age drinking and gambling on fruit machines.

2.2 Through the RFU Continuum, the RFU wishes to promote the ‘spirit of rugby’. This means the enjoyment of learning a challenging team sport that values effort as much as achievement. In the past, some adults involved in developing Mini-Midi Rugby promoted a ‘win at any cost’ culture to the exclusion of the wider values of the game including enjoyment, teamwork and respect for the efforts of others. The Continuum includes Codes specifically designed to overcome such negative attitudes for the greater good of the game.

3. Status

3.1 In addition to the playing rules for each age grade, the RFU Continuum contains ‘Regulations’ and ‘Recommendations’. Failure by Schools/Clubs, their match officials and coaches to observe the ‘Regulations’ may invalidate the insurance cover provided by the RFU. In contrast ‘Recommendations’ represent best practice and Schools and Clubs must endeavour to follow these.

3.2 The RFU Continuum includes a limited number of permitted exceptions to certain regulations (referred to as ‘dispensations’). Applications for additional dispensations must be made to the Director, Tournaments & Competitions Department at Twickenham. Details of the dispensations sanctioned by the Continuum for IAPS schools are outlined in the IAPS Sports Handbook.

REGULATIONS

4. Child Protection

4.1 Each Club and School must comply with the RFU’s Policy and Procedures for the Welfare of Young People in Rugby Union at Appendix 3. Failure to do so will be considered prejudicial to the interests of the RFU and may result in disciplinary action under RFU Rule 5.12.

4.2 Each Club and School must ensure:

4.2.1 the Codes of Practice in the Policy and Procedures for the Welfare of Young People in Rugby Union at Appendix 3 are drawn to the attention of their coaches and match officials;

4.2.2 the Codes of Conduct in Appendix 2 to these Continuum Regulations are circulated to the relevant persons involved with Mini-Midi Rugby at their Club or School;

4.2.3 a Child Protection Policy, conforming to the RFU’s recommendations, has been produced and communicated to all involved with Mini-Midi Rugby at their Club or School;

4.2.4 their child protection officer(s) complete the RFU’s “Best Practice and Child Protection” distance learning course, which is available from the Community Pages of the RFU’s website or by telephoning 020 8831 7454

4.2.5 all adults at the Club or School involved in delivering Mini-Midi Rugby complete a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure Form.

5. Player Registration

5.1 Each Club must ensure all its Mini-Midi Rugby players complete and return registration forms to the Constituent Body's Youth Registration Official within 45 days of their first joining a Club.

5.2 Team managers may be required to produce for inspection registration cards for each player when participating in competitive matches. Registration records and copies of any special dispensations issued by the RFU should be taken to each match so the match officials and/or the coach of the opposing team can confirm the ages of players if requested.

6. Age Grades and Dispensations

6.1 Age Grades

6.1.1 The age grades are as follows:

- **Under 7 and Under 8 (stage 1)** - both age grades play **Mini Tag Rugby** to the same rules except that Under 8s can only be tagged a maximum number of times;
- **Under 9 and Under 10 (stage 2)** - both age grades play **Mini Rugby** to the same rules except Under 9s have uncontested scrums and line-outs and Under 10s have contested scrums and line-outs;
- **Under 11 and Under 12 (stage 3)** - both age grades play **Midi Rugby** to the same rules.

6.1.2 A player's age grade is determined by their age at midnight on 31 August at the beginning of each Season.

6.1.3 During the course of each Season, players may only play rugby with other players in their age grade unless they are permitted to play with players from a different age grade under a dispensation.

6.1.4 When participating in Fixtures or Festivals, the Club and/or School must inform the coaches and match officials of opposing teams of any dispensation being applied and identify each player concerned.

6.2 Dispensations

The following dispensations apply as exceptions to the age grade provisions above. Particular attention is drawn to the need to ensure that player safety is not compromised when applying any of these dispensations since players of different age grades and development will be playing together and the duty of care owed to players means it may not always be appropriate to allow a player to take advantage of a dispensation.

6.2.1 Team Dispensation

If Clubs or Schools do not have enough players to complete a squad, players may play down one age grade within each Continuum Stage only subject to the strict observance of the following qualifications:

- (a) the maximum number of players allowed to play down is two;
- no player will be allowed to play down two age grades in any circumstances; and
- no Under 9 (or above) player may train or play with a player aged 6 in any circumstances.

A Club or School may complete multiple squads using this dispensation.

6.2.2 Training Dispensation

During internal Club or School training, players may train together and play internal training matches together in the following groups only:

- (a) Under 7 and Under 8 squads;

(b) Under 9 and Under 10 squads, although no Under 10 player or above may play with an Under 8 player playing in an Under 9 team under a dispensation;

(c) Under 11 and Under 12 squads, although no Under 13 player is permitted to train with an Under 11 or Under 12 squad in any circumstances.

6.2.3 RFU Special Dispensation

The vast majority of children, with correct coaching, can play in their correct age grades but in exception circumstances, where the safety of the child may be compromised due a developmental disability (physical or behavioural), application may be made to the RFU for an individual dispensation permitting a player to play down one age grade. Such dispensation will last for only one Season. Application for such dispensation should be submitted to the RFU Tournaments & Competitions Director and should be accompanied by documentary evidence or signed statements confirming the player's disability.

For the avoidance of doubt, special dispensations to play outside of their true age grade will not be granted to players merely because they appear to have skills inferior or superior to their team mates.

6.2.4 6 Year Old Player Dispensation

To encourage recruitment, children may enter the Under 7 age grade immediately they attain their sixth birthday. Players aged 6 or over may not however take advantage of this dispensation if it will result in their training or playing with Under 9s playing in an Under 8 team under Continuum

Regulation 7.5.1. Clubs and Schools are advised that the introduction of players under the age of 6 into Mini-Midi Rugby squads may invalidate the compulsory insurance cover provided by the RFU for players in those squads and for their coaches and/or match officials.

6.2.5 12 Year Old Player Dispensation

In addition to any Team Dispensation, where a School or Club does not have enough players to form an Under 12 squad, Under 12 players may play with an Under 13 side but only with written parental consent. A Club or School may use this dispensation if it has more Under 12 players than are required to complete a squad.

6.2.6 Special Dispensation for Clubs with Small Number of Players

(a) Dispensation:

- (i) To allow age bands rather than single age grades. I.e. U7s with U8s; U9s with U10s; U11s with U12s
- (ii) Dispensation to be for one season at a time.
- (iii) Teams to play in Continuum Rules of Play for the younger age grade. I.e. Under 7 Mini Tag; Under 9 Mini Rugby; Under 11 Midi Rugby
- (iv) No more than half the players on the pitch at any time in a game should be from the older age grade
- (v) Teams can play in friendly fixtures after advising the opposition and gaining their consent.
- (vi) Teams cannot take part in competitive Festivals (unless they comply with the existing Continuum age grade regulations)
- (vii) The Continuum Age Grade Dispensations 6.2.1 & 6.2.2 are not applicable to those granted this Special Dispensation.

(b) Approval:

To be granted by the RFU Tournaments & Competitions Director upon receipt of:-

- (i) Application from the Club Secretary with a signed declaration showing numbers of players in each age grade
- (ii) This to be certified by CBRDP (7-18 Chair) / RDO.

(iii) A declaration by each age group Coach that the children in the proposed age grouping are capable of playing in the proposed amalgamated two year age banding.

(c) Conditions:

- (i) The age group Coach should be qualified and have completed a recognised Child Protection course
- (ii) The coach must discuss with the parents, the differences in physical development of all the children in the proposed age band and how it affects their child before obtaining their consent.
- (iii) The parents must be fully briefed by the coach concerned on how their child could cope with the differences in physical development between the children in their two year age band.
- (iv) Players must be registered on the RFU Youth Registration System.

7. Season

The Mini-Midi Rugby season starts on 1 September each year. Fixtures and Festivals may only take place during the period commencing on the 5th Sunday of the season and ending on the Mayday Bank Holiday Monday. Outside this period, players may only participate in training and recruitment initiatives.

8. Fixtures and Festivals

8.1 Fixtures and Festivals must comply with these Continuum Regulations.

8.2 Festival organisers may impose additional conditions on participations including maximum squad sizes which should not be less than:

- (a) *Under 7 and Under 8 – 10 players;*
- (b) *Under 9 and Under 10 – 13 players;*
- (c) *Under 11 and Under 12 – 17 players.*

Teams are not prevented from participating with less than this number should they wish.

8.3 Festival organisers may not exclude players who would be permitted to play down an age grade in accordance with a valid dispensation.

8.4 Each player is limited to playing in not more than:

- (a) 17 Club Fixtures and/or Festivals during a season in addition to any Fixtures and/or Festivals played by them for their Schools;
- (b) 17 School Fixtures and/or Festivals during a season in addition to any Fixtures and/or Festivals played by them for their Club; and
- (c) 1 Festival during the same weekend, during which teams are only permitted to play in a maximum of 5 games.

8.5 Clubs and Schools must maintain a record of how many Fixtures and Festivals are played by each player to ensure they are not exceeding these limits.

8.6 Where Clubs or Schools have large squads, additional Fixtures and/or Festivals may be arranged, provided no player plays in more than the maximum number referred to in Continuum Regulation 8.4 above.

9. Duration of Matches and Sessions

9.1 Matches

9.1.1 A match is made up of two halves, with half-time lasting not less than 2 minutes.

9.1.2 Matches are limited to the following durations:

(a) Under 7 and Under 8:

- Fixture (2 Clubs or Schools are present): 10 minutes each way, 1 game = 20 minutes
- Fixture (3 Clubs or Schools are present): 7 minutes each way, 2 games = 30 minutes
- Festival: 5 minutes each way, maximum of 5 games = 50 minutes

(b) Under 9 and Under 10:

- Fixture (2 Clubs or Schools are present): 15 minutes each way, 1 game = 30 minutes

- Fixture (3 Clubs or Schools are present): 10 minutes each way, 2 games = 40 minutes
- Festival: 6 minutes each way, maximum of 5 games = 60 minutes

(c) Under 11 and Under 12:

- Fixture (2 Clubs or Schools are present): 20 minutes each way, 1 game = 40 minutes
- Fixture (3 Clubs or Schools are present): 15 minutes each way, 2 games = 60 minutes
- Festival: 7 minutes each way, maximum of 5 games = 70 minutes

9.1.3 No extra time is permitted in any match except that added for injury time.

9.1.4 Matches must be brought to an end if the points difference rises to more than 30.

9.2 Sessions

Festivals, fixtures, coaching and training sessions (including time devoted to match play) must last no longer than the following:

- (a) *Under 7 and Under 8: 60 minutes;*
- (b) *Under 9 and Under 10: 90 minutes;*
- (c) *Under 11 and Under 12: 120 minutes.*

10. Pitches

10.1 The maximum pitch size is

- (a) *Under 7 and Under 8 – 60 metres by 30 metres, plus 5 metres for each ingoal area.*
 - (b) *Under 9 and Under 10 – 60 metres by 35 metres, plus 5 metres for each ingoal area.*
 - (c) *Under 11 and Under 12 – 60 metres by 43 metres, plus 5 metres for each ingoal area.*
- Provision should be made to indicate the position of the line 15 metres out from each goal line, serving a similar purpose to the 22 metre line in the iRB Laws of the Game.

10.2 Reduced pitch sizes are acceptable provided this is agreed between the officiating referee and coaches, and the smaller pitches do not materially increase the risk of injury to players.

10.3 Adjacent pitches should be no closer than 5 metres

11. Equipment

11.1 The following size ball shall be used by the following age grades:

- (a) *Under 7, Under 8, Under 9 – size 3*
- (b) *Under 10, Under 11, Under 12 – size 4*

11.2 Players may only use studs and other clothing during training and matches that are in accordance with the iRB Laws of the Game.

11.3 Players may wear specially designed and manufactured “goggles” provided the child’s optician certifies that:

- (a) They only allow the player to have properly corrected vision and do not substantially restrict any normal field of vision.
- (b) They do not constitute a physical danger to the wearer or other players.

12. Administration

Every School and Club providing Mini-Midi Rugby is responsible for its proper administration in accordance with the Rugby Continuum. The administration of Mini-Midi Rugby is overseen by Constituent Bodies and County Schools’ Unions which are required to ensure that affiliated Schools and Clubs adhere to the RFU Continuum.

13. Discipline

13.1 If the referee decides that a player must cease to participate in a match, they must stop the match, call the individual player aside from the other players and invite the coach of that player on to the field. The referee must explain to the coach and the player why they feel the player’s behaviour is

unacceptable and instruct the coach to provide a substitute player. That player is to take no further part in that Fixture or Festival. It is the responsibility of the coach to speak to and educate the player as to why such actions were taken.

13.2 Clubs and Schools will have a Child Protection Policy (which conforms to the RFU's recommendations) and a player disciplinary procedure. Whilst player indiscipline (including physical and verbal abuse and actions contravening the RFU Continuum) will in most cases be dealt with in accordance with the player disciplinary procedure, it should be recognised that there will be some instances where the relevant actions also fall within the scope of the Child Protection Policy.

13.3 In the case of actions on the part of adults involved in Mini and Midi Rugby which contravene the Codes of Practices in Appendix 2, the recommended procedure is as follows:

(a) the match or training session should be stopped and the match officials and coaches should confer and agree on a course of action appropriate to the circumstances. This may include the match officials and relevant coach warning the adult concerned or requesting the relevant adult to vacate the vicinity of the pitch before recommencing the match or training. In extreme cases or where the adult refuses to cooperate, the match or training should be abandoned;

(b) the match officials and coaches should notify the incident to the Chairmen of the Mini-Midi Sections of their respective Clubs or the Head of Games in the case of Schools for further consideration. In extreme cases this may include banning the relevant adult from attending matches and/or training sessions for a period and/or submission of a complaint to the relevant Constituent Body;

(c) where relevant actions fall within the Child Protection Policy, Clubs and Schools should also institute the procedures contained in such policy.

13.4 In all cases where a disciplinary matter has been referred to a Constituent Body, the Constituent Body may require either Club or School to provide additional information on the incident including confirmation of the action taken and may in exceptional cases refer the matter to the RFU for further consideration and sanctions.

14. Playing Rules

14.1 The Rugby Continuum includes playing rules for Mini-Midi Rugby at each age grade in Appendix 1.

14.2 Both players and match officials should endeavour to follow these playing rules, which include various modifications to the IRB Laws of the Game. These modifications are gradually reduced as a player progresses through each age grade. Where no modifications have been made, the IRB Laws of the Game should be followed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Health & Safety

15.1 Each Club and School should have close regard to its health and safety responsibilities, and carry out and record formal risk assessments each season to ensure the safe and competent coaching of rugby. Further guidance on the provision of a safe rugby environment can be obtained from the RFU via email at communityrugby@rfu.com

15.2 The RFU strongly recommends that Clubs and Schools have suitably qualified first aiders present to provide immediate assistance to any player who is injured, whether during training sessions or during competitive play outside opposition.

15.3 The RFU strongly recommends the wearing of mouth guards (ideally custom made from a dental impression of the teeth) in case of accidental collision as well as shin guards.

15.4 If a player appears injured, the referee must blow the whistle and stop play immediately. Obviously the referee must use judgment – players don't want to stop for every slight knock – but it is usually possible to tell when a player is hurt.

Where possible, invite the player to get up. If it hurts them to move, let them stay where they are (if this will not worsen their injury) and send for expert help. In all cases it is essential that other people/players are stopped from rushing in and hauling the player to their feet. They may mean well, but they could make the damage even worse. In summary, take no chances: act fast but act with caution.

15.5 If referees find themselves in an injury situation, they must concentrate on vital things. If there is difficulty breathing remove the player's mouthguard. If they seem stunned, they may be concussed: if so, they must leave the field and have a medical examination. If there is any bleeding, the player must leave the field for treatment unless to do so would worsen their injury.

15.6 Through the Rugby Continuum, the RFU has established a framework within which those involved with rugby can provide playing opportunities for players. In doing so the responsibility to try and ensure the safety of both players and those providing such opportunities must not be overlooked and any School, Club or Constituent Body providing rugby opportunities to young players should only do so having considered carefully the issue of safety. This means avoiding exposure of players, coaches and match officials to situations that are too risky for the particular circumstances. Coach education courses for Mini/Midi Rugby have therefore been designed specifically to give individuals (whether in Schools or in Clubs) the opportunity to gain an understanding of coaching young players safely. Further guidance on the provision of a safe rugby environment can be obtained from www.community-rugby.com

15.7 The development of all contact (contested or uncontested scrums and line outs) must be introduced using the techniques contained in current RFU coaching manuals. Tackling is a skill that needs to be taught and must be introduced progressively as shown in the current RFU Coaching Course materials. Similarly, the formation of the scrum must be introduced in a progressive way following the stages described in current RFU Coaching Course materials.

15.8 Dangerous play can cause injury; coaches and match officials must be particularly vigilant to prevent it. There will always be knocks and bumps in rugby, but if dangerous play is eliminated, then many serious injuries will never happen. After a stoppage for injury, restart play with a free pass to the team that had been in possession of the ball immediately prior to the stoppage.

16. Coaching Education

16.1 The RFU strongly recommends that Clubs and Schools ensure their coaches acquire and develop coaching skills which are appropriate for the age grades they are coaching. This ensures improved playing standards throughout the game, reduces the risk of players suffering injury, increases consistency in the development of youth rugby and adds to the enjoyment for players.

16.2 Coaching training comprises a combination of attending RFU-approved coach education courses (leading to a qualification), supplemented by attendance at coaching seminars and regular reading of coaching materials and viewing of coaching videos and DVDs. For further information on up-to-date products email

coachingyoungplayers@rfu.com, visit the RFU's website or telephone 0800 834551.

16.3 Clubs and Schools are strongly advised that qualified coaches supervise all persons who do not hold current coaching qualifications appropriate to the age grades they are coaching. Details of RFU-approved coach education courses can be obtained from your Constituent Body or Rugby Development Officer.

16.4 The RFU recommends that the months of September and January are used by Clubs and Schools to help coaches develop their coaching skills and, as appropriate, to qualify themselves to coach their current age grade or to prepare for coaching another age grade the following season. While team coaching/training sessions and competitive matches may continue to take place in January, this should not prevent coaches from engaging in such education activities and Clubs and Schools should give priority to coaches' education during these months.

16.5 The RFU also makes the following recommendations:

- (a) at a fixture, a coaching session should precede each match;

- (b) all matches should be used as an extension of the coaching session with the emphasis being on the quality of performance rather than the result;
- (c) during matches, coaches can direct and develop play in a coaching sense on the field of play from behind their teams;
- (d) at Under 7 and Under 8 age grade, coaches must help to encourage the carrying of the ball in two hands and prompt players to pass when tagged but should avoid interfering with the flow of the game and must not have any contact with players of either side while on the pitch;
- (e) the emphasis must be on enjoyment and players must be encouraged to enjoy the physical skills of running, passing and evasion;
- (f) during half-time intervals, coaches must take time to talk to, encourage, coach and explain the game to the players;
- (g) mismatches can be avoided by talking to the coach in charge of the opposition before the game.

MISCELLANEOUS

17. Changes

In preparing the RFU Continuum, the RFU has made great efforts to ensure that the regulations and recommendations reflect the way Mini-Midi Rugby is played in practice whilst also establishing a framework that will promote the development of a positive rugby culture. This is a constantly evolving process driven by the Rugby Continuum Review Group which welcomes constructive suggestions as to how the RFU Continuum can be further improved. Any suggestions should be sent to the Chairman of the Continuum Review Group at the RFU and, if agreed and adopted, will become part of the RFU Continuum.

18. Forum

A Rugby Continuum Forum can be found in the Forum/Chat section of the RFU website (www.rfu.com). It provides information, promotes discussions and advises on a range of coaching and refereeing topics. Mini-Midi coaches, parents and others can use the Forum to ask questions, seek advice, share ideas and express their views. Andy Dixon, an experienced coach, hosts the Forum.