



PLAYING CHARTER

As framed by the International Rugby Board
2009 Edition

Introduction

A game which started out as a simple pastime has been transformed into a global network around which vast stadia have been built, an intricate administrative structure created and complex strategies devised. Rugby Union, in common with any activity which attracts the interest and enthusiasm of all kinds of people, has many sides and faces.

Apart from the playing of the game and its ancillary support, rugby embraces a number of social and emotional concepts such as courage, loyalty, sportsmanship, discipline and teamwork. What this Charter does is to give the game a checklist against which the mode of play and behaviour can be assessed. The objective is to ensure that rugby maintains its unique character both on and off the field. The Charter covers the basic principles of rugby as they relate to playing and coaching, and to the creation and application of the Laws.

It is hoped that the Charter, which is an important complement to the Laws of the game, will set the standards for all those who are involved in rugby, at whatever level.

Principles of the Game

Conduct

The legend of William Webb Ellis, who is credited with first picking up the football and running with it, has doggedly survived the countless revisionist theories since that day at Rugby School in 1823. That the game should have its origins in an act of spirited defiance is somehow appropriate.

At first glance it is difficult to find the guiding principles behind the game which, to the casual observer, appears to be a mass of contradictions. It is perfectly acceptable, for example, to be seen exerting extreme physical pressure on an opponent in an attempt to gain possession of the ball, but not wilfully or maliciously to inflict injury. These are the boundaries within which players and referees must operate and it is the capacity to make this decision, combined with control and discipline, both individual and collective, upon which the code of conduct depends.

Spirit

Rugby owes much of its appeal to the fact that it is played both to the letter and within the spirit of the Laws.. The responsibility for ensuring that this happens lies not with one individual – it involves coaches, captains, players and referees.

It is through discipline, control and mutual respect that the spirit of the game flourishes and, in the context of a game as physically challenging as rugby, these are the qualities which forge the fellowship and sense of fair play so essential to the continuing success and survival of the game.

Old fashioned traditions and virtues they may be, but they have stood the test of time and, at all levels at which the game is played, they remain as important to the future of rugby as they have been throughout its long and distinguished past. The principles of rugby are the fundamental elements upon which the game is based and they enable participants to immediately identify the character of the game and what makes it distinctive as a sport.

Object

The object of the game is that two teams, each fifteen players, observing fair play, according to the Laws and in a sporting spirit should, by carrying, passing, kicking and grounding the ball, score as many points as possible

Rugby is played by men and women and by boys and girls worldwide. More than three million people aged from 6-60 regularly participate in the playing of the game. The wide variation of skills and physical requirements needed for the game mean that there is an opportunity for individuals of every shape, size and ability to participate at all levels.

Contest and Continuity

The contest for possession of the ball is one of the key features of rugby. These contests occur throughout the game and in a number of different forms:

- in contact
- in general play
- when play is re-started at scrums, line-outs and kick-offs.

The contests are balanced in such a way as to reward superior skill displayed in the preceding action. For example, a team forced to kick for touch because of its inability to maintain the play, is denied the throw-in to the line-out. Similarly, the team knocking the ball on or passing the ball forward is denied the throw-in at the subsequent scrum.. The advantage then must always lie with the team throwing the ball in, although, here again, it is important that these areas of play can be fairly contested.

It is the aim of the team in possession to maintain continuity by denying the opposition the ball and, by skilful means, to advance and score points. Failure to do this will mean the surrendering of possession to the opposition either as a result of shortcomings on the part of the team in possession or because of the quality of the opposition defence.

Principles of the Laws

The principles upon which the Laws of the game are based are:

A Sport for All

The Laws provide players of different physiques, skills, genders and ages with the opportunity to participate at their levels of ability in a controlled, competitive and enjoyable environment. It is incumbent upon all who play rugby to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Laws of the game.

Maintaining the Identity

The Laws ensure that the distinctive features of rugby are maintained through scrums, line-outs, mauls, rucks, kick-offs and re-starts. The key features also relating to contest and continuity – the backward pass, the offensive tackle.

Enjoyment and Entertainment

The Laws provide the framework for a game that is both enjoyable to play and entertaining to watch, If, on occasions, these objectives appear to be incompatible, enjoyment and entertainment are enhanced by enabling the players to give full rein to their skills. To achieve the correct balance, the Laws are constantly under review.

Application

There is an over-riding obligation on the players to observe the Laws and to respect the principles of fair play. The Laws must be applied in such a way as to ensure that the game is played according to the principles of play. The referee and touch judges can achieve this through fairness, consistency, sensitivity and, at the highest levels, management. It is the responsibility of coaches, captains and players to respect the authority of the match officials

Conclusion

Rugby is valued as a sport for men and women, boys and girls. It builds teamwork, understanding, co-operation and respect for fellow athletes. Its cornerstones are, as they always have been: the pleasure in participating; the courage and skill which the game demands; the love of a team sport that enriches the lives of all involved; and the lifelong friendships forged through a shared interest in the game. It is because of, not despite, the intensely physical and athletic characteristics of rugby that such great camaraderie exists before and after matches. The long-standing tradition of players from competing teams enjoying each other's company away from the pitch and in a social context, remains the very core of the game. Rugby has fully embraced the professional era, but has retained the ethos and traditions of the recreational game. In an age in which many traditional sporting qualities are being diluted or even challenged, rugby is rightly proud of its ability to retain high standards of sportsmanship, ethical behaviour and fair play. It is hoped that this Charter will help reinforce those cherished values.

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