

WHY MY SON LETS ME WATCH RUGBY UNION

As many of you will know by now, my first article for Lancashire Rugby - "Why I Allow My Son to Play Rugby Union" seemed to hit a harmonious chord with many of our rugby family both in this country and abroad.

My youngest son Owen viewed all of this social media activity with an arched eyebrow (due in part I suspect from having had 6 black eyes already this season). Finally he deigned to comment - "Mother - have you ever thought about what you get from watching me play rugby?"

He's absolutely right - I do benefit immensely from the rugby injection into my week and I believe it makes me a better partner, friend, colleague and Rugby Mum.

There are numerous physical and mental health benefits to watching our beloved game. These are just a few....

The bracing walk around the pitches with a variety of rugby dogs (often to the bemusement of the boy and his team mates) is a vain attempt to try and get just a little bit fitter. I also find that the stress of a bad day at work or an awkward client fades right away after a good shout and jump about on the touchline.

Rugby magically gets me out of the house and I avoid the mid-week vegetative slump on the sofa that so addles my brain with banal television. Those Sunday mornings that all too quickly disappear over the coffee pot and the newspapers? No, I'm up, dressed and on parade, loading up the slow cooker (sometimes I even remember to switch it on) so that the ravenous hoards come home to a hot meal - and I actually feel much better for it.

Rugby makes me responsible. We all know that many of the adult members of our rugby family are, ahem, fond of an alcoholic beverage or two. Nothing wrong with that good people, but when you know that you are up at 7.30am on Sunday morning, loading the car with young players and face a long drive to and from the match, the extra glass tends to stay firmly in the bottle.

I benefit enormously from free "talking therapies" from my fellow Rugby Mums and Dads - how many times have we dissected a shared problem over that flask of coffee in the car and given each other more of a lift than any lineout ever could? When faced with issues in my own life I have tended to say to myself "I'll run this one past the rugby family"- and I've never yet been disappointed with the outcome. By the time I've returned home I'm armed with a solution, my positive pants are firmly back on and my son receives a valuable lesson in "when the going gets tough the tough get going".

I benefit hugely from the massive hidden resource that is shared rugby parenting. I've listened and learnt how to deal with all sorts of issues- teenage angst at not making the team selection, a variety of injuries, even hormonal surges (sometimes his, more often mine). I firmly believe that this is one of the main reasons why we are building young people to be proud of. It is the antithesis of parenting in isolation.

There is a definite increase in parent power on rugby days- if I notice that someone on the squad isn't wearing a head guard, and I call across to remind them to do so, there is a far greater chance that the player will react than if his own Mum did the same. Rugby Mums are tough birds but never ever cross your Rugby Aunts!

I am continually learning new and transferable skills. Having observed some amazing “back of the Jeep” speeches from rugby coaches - I can now confidently deliver one to the toughest teams in the workplace. I have yet to use the favourite phrase of a Hutton coach (“grow a pair!”) but that day will no doubt come. I’ve finally learnt how to use the maps app on my phone to find far flung rugby clubs without ending up down cul-de-sacs. I can now use social media effortlessly, and I have even deciphered complex rugby union rules/laws to discover what on earth a double movement might be. The first time I yelled “double movement!” at the telly - before even the Referee had blown his whistle - my son was slack jawed in amazement (such a nice feeling).

Have I mentioned the additional shopping opportunities that make me so happy? I now have a rugby wardrobe full of jolly hats, jazzy socks and the sort of wellies I coveted for years but didn’t dare buy. A selection of sunglasses has been purchased in the vain hope that the weather marginally improves before the end of the season. Rugby ear-rings have been mentioned. Granted, our Rugby Dads tend mostly to look like an Army Regiment on manoeuvres clothed in various shades of olive green, but every once in a while they join in the fun with a daft hat or an interesting T shirt (photos please chaps). A recent sale of thermal underwear in Marks and Sparks saw me positively giddy with excitement, madly texting my fellow mums for their sizes so I could scoop up armfuls of the blessed things and plant them down at the tills as if I’m scoring the winning try at Twickenham. I will never forget being part of a line of four ladies stood out in atrocious Lancastrian weather at Preston Grasshoppers - all applying their lip gloss before the match started. We Rugby Mums have our standards you see - and long may that continue!

Most of all I benefit from having good old fashioned fun which in this day and age isn’t always easy to find. The banter, the jokes, the Tours that feel like school trips all over again. In a rugby concussion workshop recently we were all earnestly told by the tutor that the tackling rules were going to be changed soon “to nipple height” – this had me and two of my dearest rugby friends convulsed into the kind of silent laughter I last experienced at the back of an O level Geography class.

Looking around me I see members of my very own tribe – kindred spirits, people that I actually like, who my son and I can respect and who make us feel part of a very special inclusive family.

Society is floundering. It’s often the silent majority that are now asking themselves “where do I fit into this brave new world?” I would suggest that they do what Owen and I did - go along to your friendly local rugby club and feel instantly better about life in general. It’s like coming home.

Jayne Dolloway