

## **Why I allow my son to play Rugby Union**

Let's get one thing straight. Rugby is a tough contact sport. Its physical, loud and fast paced- my son likens it to going into battle and says it's better than any Xbox game (praise indeed...)

It's also played during the colder months of the year in conditions that can often freeze the bristles off a yard broom as we say in Lancashire.

There are weekly training sessions, drills, practice games, matches, Tours to organise.

And then there is the washing..... oh my word. THE WASHING.

So why do we let them do it?

Let me tell you this. Rugby is like an invisible gas. It gets into your mind and soul and before you know it – it shapes and defines your week. It stealthily binds players, coaches, referees, managers and spectators into one big Rugby Family.

I will never forget the first time I took my very excited 11 year old son to his first Sale Sharks game.

The first thing he spotted was that the crowds were mixed and people were enjoying a beer – “this doesn't happen at football does it Mum?” He had proudly but shyly worn his Hutton Grammar School rugby training top. As we took our seats an elderly gentleman tapped him smartly on the shoulder and said “you won't go far wrong learning rugby at that establishment young man” – and then proceeded to guide him through watching the Sale game like a surrogate Grandfather.

The RFU Code of Rugby lists Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship as the primary objectives of rugby. I would take that one step further.

In the frightening world that we live in this Code enables its followers to attain and develop the skills they need for Life - and not just rugby. They learn how to be decent upstanding members of society prepared to work hard and play hard. This may be an old fashioned view but our heritage sport has much to offer the contemporary world. After 25 years as a HR Manager recruiting staff I can spot a rugby player by their attitude and behaviour and I know from my line managers that they make excellent employees.

All shapes and sizes regardless of background come together in a rugby team like cogs in a wheel. I have seen children with physical and mental limitations respond almost immediately to the sheer joy of participating in healthy exercise and having plenty of good old fashioned FUN. The shy lad who never gets picked for school football and thinks he is fat gets encouraged to have a go - and earns a welcome pat on the back from a new team mate or coach that carries him through the rest of his week in style. Advice around fitness and nutrition is more likely to be taken on board when it comes from a coach than a parent. The lad builds his confidence along with his fitness and before you know it his head is held high.

Not all children live in traditional family groups today. This is where our rugby family plays its part by giving them alternative role models and comrades who they can learn from and trust. It gives them the self-confidence to make choices in a world that is increasingly dangerous and challenging. I would be lying if I didn't gain some reassurance from the fact that I know my own son can handle himself physically and, as a known rugby player, has avoided confrontation walking home from school.

The life skills are plain to see. Teamwork and communication is vital in rugby. Win or lose they develop comradeship with their rugby brethren that can last a lifetime. They also learn how to lose – something I have seen adults struggle with. They are required to play by the rules and to respect the Referee at all times. Mr Nigel Owens and his ilk are held in the highest of regard. How often do I watch in horror as footballers surround the referee and scream verbal abuse into his face whilst making threatening gestures. How often do we hear of members of our communities acting in the same manner because they “know their rights”? Far better to see players calling the referee Sir and accepting decisions – even if they don’t always agree with them.

So to the parents who accost me to ask how on earth I let him play such a rough tough game I say this – why would I stop my son playing a sport that is making him a son to be proud of and has given us both so much joy (washing aside) ?

Jayne Dolloway