Pathway Booklet
U7–U8 Rugby
Unified Pathway and Vision

The WRU Rugby Department has a mission to define Wales and unite our communities by delivering excellence and developing good people TOGETHER

The unified pathway strategy for the development of the game will set out the clear aims and objectives for player and coach development.

The central messages are the principles of creativity and innovation, for both players and coaches. And the vision for playing the game is based on good quality passing and catching, good contact skills keeping continuity and building a game that will challenge the opposition with ball in hand.

The skills curriculum for the development of players within Wales has been produced to support the development of all players from U7 to senior players. Within this, development milestones will help the coach plot the progress of the young player through to senior rugby.

We need to provide coaches with a clear playing and coaching structure. Each age band of the game from grass roots to elite must have the right coach at the right level for that particular age group. We want coaches to be qualified and excellent teachers of the game who have the right skill set and attributes to positively affect the players and the teams they work with.

Coaches must add a greater importance and value to the development of technique and skill. They must have a clear playing philosophy based on a game played by challenging the opposition with ball in hand, supporting the individual at every point in the pathway.

Coaches at U7–U8 must instil a love of the game, through the promotion of fun and inclusiveness that leads to life long participation.
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A guide to U7 and U8 Tag Rugby

Rugby is our National Game that embraces the people of Wales and is part of the fabric of our community and culture. The WRU wishes to introduce young people to our game through the first steps of the U7 and U8 tag game.

These players may one day be the players, coaches, volunteers and supporter of our game in the future. All involved in the game need to understand they have a hand in developing the player and being part of their journey to a life long participation in our sport.

U7–U8 rugby offers an introduction to the game of rugby which meets the needs of the young player by utilising smaller pitches and reduced playing numbers per team.

This is supported by academic research from around the world on the value of small-sided games for improving technique and skills.

Tag rugby allows children to have fun and enjoyment within a safe environment that allows them to be regularly involved in a game which promotes handling and evasion running skills.

Adults involved in developing these players need to recognise their role is to facilitate the game to enable all players to have fun and enjoyment, make new friends whilst developing a life long love of the game.
Benefits of tag rugby

To meet the needs of the U7–U8 player, tag rugby has been introduced as a game that develop the fundamental skills of passing and evasion and basic decision-making.

The tag game meets all the needs of the player specific and developmental. Too often the children are expected to meet the requirements of the full game that is inappropriate for their stage of development.

Research has concluded that children learn and develop better in an environment, which is based on fun.

Tag Rugby, is designed as a small sided modified version of the full game, maximizes involvement, promotes fun and is simple for the players and coaches to understand.

If children are to enjoy and take part in rugby they need to:

- Take an active part in the game
- Develop their rugby skills
- Be part of a game for all players regardless of their ability
- Develop their personal skills
- Feel the benefits of being a sports person
- Understand the laws of the game
- Feel their success through development

The tag game is designed to encourage the development of the player and focuses on participation rather than the result of the game.

Children need to learn that participation and cooperation is vital for their development but also appreciate the values of being a member of a team.
Why do children play?

The role of the adult is to facilitate a learning environment that is engaging and fun that also develops players’ skills and understanding of the game. However the reasons children want to play the game must be understood in order to create an appropriate rugby environment. Children’s reasons for playing are often different to adults.

Children learn more when they are playing:

• I love playing rugby because it’s fun
• It helps me make friends
• It keeps me fit and healthy
• I love playing because I enjoy myself, winning is not the most important thing

Adults must always adopt a child-centred approach, putting the needs of the child first. Though competition is good, research suggests that children in primary school up to the age of twelve say that winning is not the most important thing to them, the winning of tournaments is second to recognition of their efforts and their fun and enjoyment.

Children tell us that they would rather play in festivals and have more playing opportunities than playing for trophies or cups.

The players player of all awards presented to children becomes the most valuable one due to the fact that all their team mates have voted for it. However, a feeling of self worth remains the most important reward for players and one that should be fostered by coaches.

The learning environment, which is created by the coaches and spectators is vital for child development, this must be what the child expects and not what the coaches and the spectator’s version.

Taking all of the above into consideration coaches and spectators should apply the learning principles so that rugby is a fun and socially enjoyable experience for all children involved in our game.
What can children expect from adults?

Children are easily led, anxious to please, and prone to over enthusiasm. Lots of praise and encouragement is needed especially for beginners. Coaches must play a vital part in ensuring that the child’s interests are always put first.

Providing an environment that promotes positive reinforcement will enable the player to develop and flourish. Positive reinforcement reduces the child’s anxiety and decreases their concern about failing.

Mistakes are part of the natural learning process. For young people to develop we should accept mistakes as a necessary part of their development.

Role models

Coaching young children can be a rich and satisfying experience. It is also a tremendous responsibility. The children involved in our rugby clubs and schools are the next generation of rugby men and women. The attitudes they learn here can affect every aspect of their lives. Your work can help to give them confidence – or undermine what little confidence they have.

Once a rapport is established between coaches and players, their confidence will naturally grow and you are likely to see improvements in their game and their enjoyment of the sport.
Safeguarding children is extremely important and you may find yourself in a position where players choose to confide in you on issues concerning them. At this point it is essential to understand the roles and responsibilities of volunteers in your club and allow the appropriate individual to handle any sensitive matters. Your club welfare officer will be equipped to handle such matters and should be contacted if you sense any potential problems.

The learning process for young people to develop will incur mistakes, accepting mistakes is a necessary part of development. The environment to support their development without worrying about making mistakes is vital for progress.

**Build confidence:**
- Provide positive encouragement
- Learning from mistakes
- Reward effort rather than ability
- Be a positive role model
- Always be constructive

**Respect the game:**
- Promote the rules
- Promote fair play
- Respect opponents
- Always work as a group

**Opportunities for success:**
- Success through development. Winning and losing are the least important measures of success
- Learning environment – including learning from mistakes
- Set appropriate development targets
Working with parents

The Welsh Rugby Union is committed to promoting positive behaviour, and working with parents and volunteers to ensure that we create a safe and positive environment for children to learn, develop and have fun through their experience in rugby.

It is vitally important that volunteers in Welsh rugby understand their safeguarding responsibilities in relation to the children that they interact with in the rugby environment. Sport provides a great opportunity for young athletes to develop their life skills, and rugby in particular as a team sport is an example of how positive role models can influence and shape the behaviour of others.

There is a responsibility for everyone involved in the game to ensure that respect and discipline remains a central theme in the minds of children starting out on their rugby journey. It is important that children, parents, coaches, volunteers and any other people involved in the game understand the rugby culture and ethics and treat people with respect so that everyone enjoys the ‘Welsh Rugby Experience’.

Parents play a vital role in encouraging, enabling and supporting children’s participation in rugby. They are the most influential people in a child’s psychological and sociological development. A child’s beliefs, values, and attitudes are shaped and influenced by the experiences that they have in their home environment.

Promoting parent/guardian participation and encouraging support and interest will mean the parent/guardian will then have the opportunity to reinforce what is developed in the rugby environment at home.

It is important that parents/guardians understand what the philosophy of the team/club toward the development of their children and the game of rugby. The ability to include the parent/guardian within the team framework will allow for an informative and inclusive environment. The work between parents/guardians, players and coaches is an essential element to successful communication.

It is vital that children are allowed the opportunity to think for themselves and see the playing picture in front of them and decide on outcomes promoted through making their own decision. Constant instruction from coach, parent/guardian from the sideline or pitch will only confuse the player and make them feel as if they do not understand the game they are playing. Allow the players to explore opportunities. Parents/guardians should reinforce positive play with only positive comments.
Good practice creates a safe and positive environment in rugby clubs:

**Adopt a whole child approach**

The club should be completely aligned from senior to mini and junior rugby, in terms of standard of behaviour, discipline, and compliance with the Codes of Conduct. The Senior Management Committee are ultimately responsible for safeguarding issues, and they should work closely with representatives from all age groups and in particular the Club Safeguarding Officer.

**Promote and publicise positive behaviour and expectations**

Clubs should consider promoting positive behaviour through the use of the Codes of Conduct and ‘Respect Boards’ which should be publicised in prominent places, such as club noticeboards, at the ground, and through club websites etc.

**Rugby club induction events**

Clubs should consider planning and delivering club induction events at the beginning of the season or at key times in the season. This could be used for registration or administration purposes, and also as an ‘icebreaker’ or social event for children and parents to meet with existing volunteers. It could be part of a ‘try out’ to encourage increased participation, and an opportunity for the club to brief their volunteers on what is expected in terms of standards, codes of conduct and appropriate behaviour.

**Internal reporting procedures**

The club should have an internal reporting policy and disciplinary procedures to deal with issues of poor or unacceptable behaviour. The CSO should be the point of contact for reports of poor or unacceptable behaviour, and they should liaise with the Senior Club Secretary and the WRU Safeguarding Advisor to consider a proportionate response to deal with this issue.

**Club monitoring and support mechanisms**

There should be increased monitoring of individuals or groups identified as presenting a problem in terms of their behaviour within the club. It is important that negative behaviour traits are not allowed to develop and grow within the rugby club environment.

It is also important that the action taken or sanctions imposed do not impact upon the ability of children and young people to continue to participate in rugby union. There should be support mechanisms in place for adults or children who raise such concerns.
Facilities

In order for players to develop and learn about playing the game of rugby union it is imperative that they play on appropriate pitches, which are suitable for their age group. It is important that pitches are clearly marked out with cones, this helps the player to recognise the playing area.

In order to provide a safe area to play in it is recommended that clear marked areas be used to keep parents and spectators away from the touchline. It is also recommended that a technical area is set up on both sides of the half way line to keep the substitutes together along with other coaches not involved with the game.

If clubs are having problems finding suitable pitches there may be a need to contact the local authority parks department or local schools to help in providing playing areas for teams. WRU regional development managers can also help in building relationships with the local schools and the local authority.

To safeguard your players it’s advisable to check the field prior to playing for any objects that may cause injury and also check for dog fouling. The team and the parents can help by walking the playing area before a game to check for and pick up any debris.
Pitch layout
A typical pitch layout for an U7 game

Playing area
- max 50m x 40m
- min 40m x 30m

Supporter area
- 2m from pitch in designated areas

Technical area
- 10m either side of the half way
Respect and managing
the match day environment

Rugby is a sport that creates great excitement for players, coaches and spectators and evokes huge emotion. It’s also a sport that requires skill, physicality and determination, and children should be able to develop their skills whilst having fun in a positive environment.

Establishing a team or club philosophy

It’s important that there is an overarching club philosophy or ethos and within that a recognition of the qualities and behaviours that make up a good club. All teams should conform to these behaviours and ethos. These issues are intrinsically linked and a good way to ensure that the club and teams are co-ordinated, and that players, coaches and parents work together effectively.

Depending upon the age group, it may differ slightly from team to team, but will be evident throughout every team in the club. The key to this, particularly in younger age groups is to ensure that the child is at the centre of this thinking and that the club have a co-ordinated and child centred approach in developing the next generation of talent.

Clubs may wish to consider the following as part of your club/team philosophy or ethos:

• Constructive and inclusive communication
• Reliability – time keeping
• Sharing responsibilities
• Team over individual
• Inclusive team selection
• Development over winning at all costs
• Respect to others
• Codes of Conduct
Developing a positive environment:

It’s extremely important that adults understand the effect that their behaviour can have. Coaches, in particular, are in a position of trust and responsibility and can heavily influence the thinking and behaviour of the children they coach. In managing the match day environment it’s important that the philosophy or ethos of the club is adopted and applied.

There are a number of clubs who promote positive behaviour through the use of ‘Respect Boards’ and some who have posted their Codes of Conduct not only on noticeboards, but also on permanent boards outside their club or changing rooms. There are Codes of Conduct for Players, Parents, Spectators and Coaches and these should be placed in a prominent place so that all volunteers and visitors are able to view this and understand the expectations in terms of behaviour of everyone at the club.

Referees and officials play an integral part in our game and have a pivotal role in ensuring that Wales national sport continues to thrive week in, week out. There is a need for all adults to understand that we must promote positive behaviour towards referees, and set good examples for children to follow.
Dealing with difficult spectators

Clubs should consider the use of a touchline manager, someone known to club members and designated to help maintain a safe and positive environment. They have a responsibility to deal with minor incidents, reducing and diffusing problems.

There are various types of ways that people react to crowd behaviour which may manifest itself in a negative way and may lead to incidents at rugby matches

- Conformity – conforming to the behaviour of those around you
- Aggression – collectively ‘letting off steam’
- Loss of individuality – losing yourself in the moment

Team Managers and Coaches set an example to all others involved in the game

There should be an explanation to parents or supporters that the following are part of the club or team philosophy or ethos:

- The children come first. It’s their game not yours
- The children are learning the game and they will make mistakes
- Referees will make mistakes, as we all do
- It is not acceptable to shout at the referee
- Promote respect for the rules of the game, officials, team mates and opponents
- Support in a positive way
- Model and reinforce positive attitudes

It should be made clear to parents or supporters that the following are not acceptable:

- Verbal aggression or abuse towards their own child, other children, officials, supporters or coaches
- Constant criticism of their own or other children
- Teasing or mocking children
- Threatening or fighting with other adults, young people or children
- Contradicting coaches’ advice and guidance
- Intimidating officials
- Having a ‘win at all costs’ mentality
- Encouraging rule breaking
- Exhibiting behaviours and acts of aggression that may constitute a criminal offence or child abuse
When dealing with unacceptable behaviour it is important to consider the following:

- Remain calm but determined to deal with the matter positively and effectively
- Don’t invade people’s personal space
- Adopt a calm and relaxed posture and attitude
- Hands open
- Listen to what is being said
- Suggest rather than tell
- Apologise if necessary

Respect

We have an obligation to provide every person, no matter what their ability, with every opportunity to attend and enjoy sport comfortably and safely. This issue affects us, our friends, our family, our club.

It is unacceptable to do nothing. Do the right thing and challenge inappropriate behaviour.
Match day tips for coaches

Prior to the game its important not to give the players too many things to concentrate on, lots of information may cause the players to get confused and not focus on the task ahead.

Before the game players need to be given some basic outcomes to aim for. You may ask them again before kick off, you can also ask the substitutes to observe to see if the players are achieving them. They could be Work Hard, Hands up and communicate.

The focus at half time can now be on whether they have achieved the tasks or not. You can also use the substitutes to feedback some of the information to the players. When players are providing positive feedback it can be more powerful than the coach giving the same information. After the game you may want the players to reflect on the game and come up with some positives and some things they need to improve on. Peer feedback can be a powerful tool to use when looking back after a game, you could group the players to look at different aspects of the game.

When speaking to young children, make sure you use appropriate language. Young children are always busy, try to get their attention before you start talking to them. Try to be positive at all times and keep things simple. Focus on the main tasks they were looking to achieve and always finish with a positive. Remember that the players are not internationals, they are just children enjoying playing rugby.
**Technical/Tactical**

Allow the players to express themselves without being criticised. Players will make mistakes, allow them to learn as much of the game for themselves as they can. Give them many opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding of the game through fun and enjoyment.

**Physical**

Start with the basics of physical movement agility, balance and coordination (ABC) in your warm ups for the games and training. Use a variety of fun games like tag ball and similar chasing games. Avoid having children standing in lines and only taking part one out of five goes, the skill of the coach is to get everyone active as possible.

**Psychological**

Coaches need to stay positive throughout the game, the game is not the moment to make an in-depth analysis of mistakes but to emphasise the players positive behaviour and to encourage them to do things without being afraid of failing.

Coaches should also be prepared to make constructive use of the experience of the game. This should be done by the reinforcement of positive aspects so that the players will repeat them, and on the other hand the coach should observe what is not going so well and what they can realistically be improved, in order to work on it later in their coaching sessions.

**Social**

Allow players to express themselves and be involved in the decision making processes, some players like ownership and feel they have made decisions. By doing this you are giving them some responsibility and trust. Praise cannot be over estimated, praise effort too.

Mistakes will happen however, some encouragement will boost their self esteem.
Developing players

We all want players to be the best they can be, However we all need to be careful of the amount pressure we put on players Create a learning environment to and players will blossom in the game, and reach their potential.

The WRU pathway provides players with the right coaches at each age group, coaches who are focused on player development and putting the player first.

Players moving through the WRU player pathway will have the best support to enable them to try and achieve their potential.

Coaching players should be about developing the whole person, in a holistic approach. This is known as player centred coaching. All coaches should aim to be player centred.

Personal development

Personal development is also vital throughout the playing career. Helping them to build their character and teach them valuable life lessons that will be important to their future. Supporting them to embrace challenges and take control of their lives, to become independent and resilient.

Creative

Creative development players can adjust, adapt and express themselves. Players can be in charge of their own development and come up with their own solutions. Players can be very creative if the coaches allow them to express themselves and are more often more creative than the coach. We must allow them to develop this and not stifle them by coaches wanting to show them the proper way.

Social development

Social development, be able to mix, meet new friends and work within group. Develop supporting and understanding others within their peer group. Be able to develop skills such as leadership, teamwork and inspiring others through their commitment to the sport. Can be able to take on roles and complete tasks along with empower others.
Cognitive development

Cognitive development helps players to make good decisions, it requires them to think about how they can improve and understand what they need to do to improve. Hopefully developing a player who in time can analyse his or her own performance and understand how to improve.

Research

Research, which suggests that deliberate play, and teaching games for understanding (TGfU) should form a large part of developing the player.

TGfU

TGfU helps the player to stretch their skills and respond to various situations that occur doing the games in training. Both approaches require the players to make decisions and develop skills in a game like context, which has been shown to develop their skills more effectively than drill-based training. TGfU is game centred rather than technique centred, games are modified and progressive to teach tactical understanding. Questioning and discussion with your players is paramount to allow players to come up with their own ideas or solutions to tactical problem.

It’s important that players try to play other sports during their early years, unfortunately due to early specialisation we see to many players coming through the age groups having not played in any other sport. This is sometimes driven by the parents to concentrate on one sport. Rugby has seen this happen within their sport where parents and coaches over emphasis one sport over all others.

The issues with specialising to soon have been to the detriment of the player and contribute to athletic deficiencies, injuries, early burnout and dropout.

Children grow and develop at different stages, not all children are the same, parents need to be patient and recognise this. The best player today will not necessarily be the best in later years. Due to maturational factors all players develop at different rates. Current performance is not an indicator of future potential in young players. It’s all about fostering the development of all players to reach their potential.
WRU Junior Physical Development Strategy U7–U8

The aim of the WRU Junior Physical Development program is to introduce children at the U7–U8 age grade to a wide range of basic fundamental athletic movement competencies that underpin co-ordinated athletic movement skills such as balance, co-ordination, sprinting, jumping and changing direction.

Through the U7–8 WRU Athletic Movement Curriculum, young athletes will have the opportunity to experience an age appropriate movement program that will allow them to take the next steps on their journey to physical literacy.

Athletic movement curriculum

It is important players develop overall fundamental movement patterns and athletic skills to allow them to maximize their athletic movement capabilities which will enable them to fully tap in to their rugby playing potential.

Strength and balance fundamentals

The fundamentals include a focus on co-ordinated and controlled full range of motion, lower and upper body movement patterns. These include squat and lunge patterns, simple upper body pushing and pulling exercises, and active trunk control.

Athletic movement and co-ordination fundamentals

Athletic movement fundamentals include how to run, jump and land effectively while also emphasising good running technique and the ability to change direction correctly.

Key coaching and development principles

- Non technical
- Fun and engaging
- Broad variety of movements and skills
- Complements diverse sport and games exposure
U7–U8 tag rugby laws

At under seven a maximum of 5v5 and at under 8 a maximum of 7v7.
Under seven and under eight are not permitted to play in inter club leagues where results are collected or published or winner’s trophies are presented. The WRU feel this is detrimental to the development of the player.

Where teams have entered festivals (which start and finish on the same day) it is recommended that each game should not exceed 10 minutes (maximum) each half.

Where possible clubs are encouraged to organise more than one opposition ‘round robin’ scenario i.e. Each team plays each other to ten minutes (Maximum).

This is recommended for three to four teams maximum. Single inter club fixtures do not provide sufficient opportunities for all players to play.

Playing Equipment: players must wear the correct footwear for the surface of the pitch e.g. no metal studs on artificial grass surfaces. Clothing must be in accordance to the IRB charter depending on the weather.

The coach’s role is to develop the children’s love of the game in a safe and fun environment and develop self-esteem in all of the children. To develop evasion skills and passing whilst moving. A qualification of at least a WRU Tag Award or ideally a WRU Children’s Level One is recommended.

The coach can also referee the game, at this level with the above qualifications. Furthermore, referees should also recognise their role is to facilitate the learning of the players, for example take a second attempt at a free pass if the first one is not within the laws.

Further details of the pathway rules can be found on the coaching locker

www.wrucoachinglocker.co.uk
Age
Under 7 as of August 31st at the start of the season.

Playing area
50m (Length) x 40 (Width) maximum. 40m (Length) x 30 (Width) Minimum.

Team size
U7 five a side with unlimited substitutions, U8 seven a side with unlimited substitutions. The WRU requires that both teams field the same amount of players throughout the game.

Periods of play
Two halves each of up to 10 minutes playing time, maximum 20 minutes of play.

Ball size
Size three.

Kicking
No kicking allowed.
Lineout
No, if ball goes into touch a free pass to the non-offending team five metres from where the ball went into touch.

Scrummage
No scrums at this age group.

To start the game a free pass on the half way line must take place, the team conceding a try will restart the game with a free pass. When six tags have been taken the ball is then turned over to the other side. The player who is tagged must play the ball within three seconds, the tackler must hand back the tag to the attacking player before continuing to play. If a player persists in not giving back the tag a penalty will be awarded to the non offending team.

All players must leave and enter the field of play at the halfway line. They must remove their tags and hand them over to the substitute entering the field to place upon their belt before the replacement can effect.

A player must have two tags before scoring a try, however if a tag is removed whilst scoring a try, the try is awarded. If a player crosses the line with one tag, he/she is brought back five metres from the try line with the tag count continuing. Players must stay on their feet to score a try. If a player spins out of contact away from the tackler, the try is allowed. Hand off are not allowed carrying the ball in two hands is encourage however this is not a tag rule.

No U8 player should play contact rugby (i.e. One year above), tag rugby can be continued to be played beyond U8 if both teams agree.
Concussion

Concussion facts

- Concussion is a brain injury
- All concussions are serious
- Concussion can often occur without loss of consciousness
- Players with any signs or symptoms of concussion must be immediately removed from playing or training
- Players must not return to play on the same day of any suspected concussion
- All players with concussion should be referred to a medical practitioner
- Players must not return to full contact sport until cleared by a medical practitioner
- Most concussions will recover with physical and mental rest
- Children and adolescents may take longer to recover following concussion
- Concussion can occur without an obvious blow to the head
- Recognise and Remove players with concussion to prevent further injury or even fatality

What is concussion?

- Concussion is a traumatic brain injury resulting in a disturbance of the brain’s function
- There are many symptoms of Concussion. Common ones include headache, dizziness, memory disturbance and balance problems
- Loss of consciousness or being knocked out occurs in less than 10% of concussions
- Loss of consciousness is not a requirement when diagnosing concussion
- A brain scan will usually be normal

Who is at risk?

Concussion can happen at any age and to anyone. However, child and adolescent players:
- Are more susceptible to concussion
- Take longer to recover
- Have more significant memory and mental processing issues
- Are more susceptible to rare and dangerous neurological complications, which in some circumstances could be fatal due to brain swelling (known as second impact syndrome)

Please visit www.wru.co.uk/eng/development/medical for a comprehensive copy of the WRU Concussion guidance
Contacts

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