



WORLD RUGBY *Putting players first*

Age Differential Playing Guideline

Introduction

This guideline aims to protect the safety and welfare of age grade rugby players by trying to ensure that participants with broadly compatible physical development and skill levels play with and against each other.

World Rugby recognizes the inherent differences across Unions world-wide and seeks to provide direction in the management of this issue for Member Unions. Member Unions will be responsible for the development of their Union specific Policy.

Guideline

Best practise is for players to play within a one year "age window". This tends to be driven by calendar year, e.g born in 1997 or in some Unions by academic year. A good example of this is the RFU's policy: <http://www.rfu.com/TheGame/~media/Files/2011/ManagingRugby/LegalAndAdmin/RFU%20Regulation%2015%20pdf.ashx>

Acceptable practise is for players to play within a two year "age window". A good example of this is the ARU's two year policy: <http://www.rugby.com.au/tryrugby/Administration/TwoYearWindowPolicy.aspx>

In exceptional circumstances a player may play within a three year "age window". As an example, a player participating in an Under 12 match must be turning 10, 11 or 12 years of age during the competition in which the match is played. In order to assess the suitability of players in such circumstances, the following criteria should be considered for inclusion within a Union's Policy:

- a. Written agreement from the player's parents or guardians to play and acceptance of the associated risk with playing with people who may be stronger and more physically developed than them;
- b. Written confirmation from a medical practitioner with an understanding of the demands of Rugby to whom the player is known that the player is in a physical condition to play Rugby at the desired level and that this view is supported by a musculo-skeletal evaluation and/or other appropriate assessments;
- c. Written agreement from a medical officer with an understanding of the demands of Rugby employed or retained by the player's home union that the player is in a physical condition to play Rugby at the desired level and that this view is supported by musculo-skeletal evaluation and/or other appropriate assessments;
- d. Written confirmation from a coach with an appropriate understanding of the physical attributes required and of the risks to players in Rugby and to whom the player is known that the player has the requisite skills and experience to play Rugby at the desired level; and
- e. Such other consents, agreements or confirmations (if any) as may be required by the player's home Union or to comply with the local jurisdiction.



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A player should not participate in an age grade competition more than three years above his or her age.

Front row players need particular attention

It is recognized that the front row (prop and hooker) in Rugby potentially carries an increased risk of injury with respect to the scrum. It is therefore recommended that a more rigid process and criteria for these positions be applied if a two year "age window" is adopted. This could be similar to the requirements set out above for the three year "age window." It is possible that Unions may introduce some form of strength assessment and or investigation into physical capacity of players in this situation.

Under no circumstances should consideration ever be given to allowing a player to play front row within a three year "age window" situation.

It is important that all people involved in a decision to permit a player from the lowest age to participate in an age group above the two-year period understand that rugby is a contact sport and, like all contact sports, players are exposed to the risk of injury. SARU is a good example of a Union adopting their own processes: <http://images.supersport.co.za/SARU%20Regulations%20for%20Under-aged%20rugby%20April%202011.pdf>

A parent or guardian of a child under the age of 18 must consent to the child playing with players who are two years older. That consent can be evidenced by completing a Consent Form.

Players irrespective of their age should be prepared in a manner to play the game safely and should have undertaken a safety awareness program such as Rugby Ready or the equivalent available within the Union.
