

Club Model: Case Study of Good Practice

Ballyclare RFC

Model Club section:

Rugby Activities

Area of good practice:

Modified Recreational - Touch Rugby

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Overview

Ballyclare RFC Touch Rugby Programme

Touch rugby at Ballyclare RFC is part of the history of the club. So much so that Wille John McBride, who lives in the town, played for many years, and mentions it in his book. Originally the programme typically involved a group of older players who no longer played on a Saturday.

Approximately 4 years ago Ballyclare wanted to broaden the appeal to get more people/players back involved in the game of rugby on a weekly basis and having fun, right across the club & community.

The programme operates from 7pm – 9pm one mid-week evening per week. Participants are as young as 14 up to 65, and involves players from 1st XV, 2nd XV, 3rd XV, 4th XV, youth teams, women, retired, refs, visitors, anyone who wants to play!

For Ballyclare the goal is to simply keep this tradition successful, simple and alive!



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What was delivered?

- Ballyclare Touch Rugby programme operates from 7pm – 9pm one mid-week evening per week.
- However many turn up, teams are sorted out on arrival. On a good night (decent weather on a bright evening), up to 45 people would turn out; maybe 10–12 hardy souls on a dark cold bad evening.
- Sessions are promoted on Facebook on a weekly basis. If at least 10 people confirm their intention to attend on the Facebook page, The club know they have a quorum to make it work, so the session happens.
- Bibs are used to separate the teams visually – it just doesn't work without the bibs!!
- There is no referee in the strict sense – it refs itself, common sense prevails, with a couple of strong characters keeping it flowing.

Why was it successful?

- An energetic organiser is key! – Someone who wants to be there, wants it to succeed and enjoys doing it. Ballyclare have great volunteers who are committed to the programme and work hard to help make it a success. The use of social media is crucial to keep the interest going. It has enabled the club to build relationships with both members and non-members in and around the Ballyclare community.
- Using Facebook and twitter to spread the word has been hugely successful with the participants sharing and tagging posts to encourage participation. Without this, it just wouldn't be as successful. It also cost the club nothing.
- It's great fun! Part of that is because, whilst it's not 'serious', it's highly competitive – players are really making an effort and they want to break that line and score!
- It's inclusive! The club make a big effort to ensure that everyone who turns out is made feel welcome and part of it.
- If one team is getting walloped, they mix it up, so it means nobody gets a sustained trouncing.

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Steps to success

- Plenty of promotion prior and especially on the day of the session - making sure the day, time and format is clearly communicated.
- It is encouraged as open to all, regardless of age, skill level, gender, fitness.
- There is no elitism in it – it's clearly about competitive fun for all – it doesn't matter if you're rubbish!
- For a short time, the club allowed much younger kids to play but this just didn't work as it was boring for those who wanted to play competitively. It was only a problem for a few weeks, and the club didn't have to make a rule on it, it just sorted itself out
- Find the right person to take the lead
- Listen to the participants
- Keep it fun and enjoyable for all

The best advice from Ballyclare RFC.....Just do it and keep it simple!!!

What has been the impact?

By hosting recreational touch rugby, the club has benefited greatly and had many positive outcomes, not only for the club and its members but also the wider community at Ballyclare. Such as

- Encouraging more people to come about the club and experience what it offers
- Promoting social activity by providing a platform for the community to meet new people and have great fun while doing it
- Providing exercise in a fun and enjoyable atmosphere
- Non playing opportunities

For participants, there have been genuine rugby lessons learned for everyone who turns out, regardless of experience or age. There has been a great levelling of the people across the club, from the very best to the very worst! Because everyone is there to try hard, work together and have a laugh.

Loads of players have gotten much fitter, even the current ones! People have genuinely made new friends right across the club. Why? Because there has been lots of mixing across teams and other groups that would not have happened otherwise – people meeting each other and having a laugh playing games with people they don't normally get a chance to mix with in normal club activity.

Many of the young players who came as youngsters have really improved in their game, with a better understanding of space, of defense, of working together, of making an effort, and of knowing how to have FUN with rugby. Lots of these players are now playing at the top end of the club.

Some retired players have come out of retirement to play every week on Saturdays!

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What are the key learnings?

Every club has its own unique circumstances, some of the things Ballyclare have learned are....

- Keep it happening, even when the numbers are poor – if people understand that the default is that it's happening, there is more chance of them making the time to come along.
- Push it on the clubs facebook page, ask people to share and post pictures/comments etc. .
- The game doesn't really work with any more than 8-a-side, as it ends up that some people find it difficult to get involved and therefore get bored, so if the numbers are big, either operate two half-pitches, or have a roll-on-roll-off every 5 minutes for a third team.
- Keep it informal – once you start making it where people have to 100% commit to be there and the teams are pre-arranged, it loses its appeal. Part of its charm is that the organisation of it is relaxed.
- Make sure everyone feel really welcome – make a big proactive effort to spot those who are new, or lack confidence, or maybe need some extra encouragement. Those people often become the core of it.
- The new more inclusive format that has welcomed a wider group hasn't been to everyone's taste, with some older players just wanting to play with other older players, and we found that some of them lost their desire to attend if there were younger people there.
- Have only one break in the middle for water and a chat, just for five minutes. Other than that, keep it going or it loses its zip as the older folks stiffen up too much!
- Use bibs for the teams – it just doesn't work without them, and it makes a massive difference.
- Don't involve players younger than Youth section players. Mini players just make it boring for most people – it takes the competition and the fun out of it. 14 and up is fine, but it normally takes younger folks a few weeks to let the ball do the work!