



HALF GAME: FAQS



Half Game: FAQs

Why is the half game rule coming in?

Age Grade players tell us that they want to play, and that being part of the team is the most important thing to them about rugby. They don't want to sit on the bench and only get a few minutes of rugby at the end of a match. Universally accepted child development models show that playing is linked to a child's enjoyment, self-esteem and confidence, which in turn is linked to their intent to continue to play.

This rule aims to increase player enjoyment, aid player development and ultimately retain Age Grade players in rugby. We are also signaling our commitment to equality to ensure that All Age Grade players have the same opportunity to play. This is a really positive message to aid recruitment as England Rugby can celebrate it is a sport which guarantees players at least half a game.

How do we know this works?

Half game has been reviewed by the University of Essex, who evaluated player feedback along with the impact on the game in the previous two seasons. Their research found that playing half a game means players are six times more likely to enjoy playing rugby than players who don't get to play half a game. There was no evidence that suggests half game impacts on the results of games or increased injury.

Clubs, schools and colleges have reported positive impact of playing half game on player numbers and satisfaction whilst players, parents, coaches and teachers report wide-scale support for the implementation.

When is this being introduced?

The half game rule is now mandatory for the 2019/20 season, following a voluntary implementation year in 2018/19.

Why has this become regulation?

Why can't we do it voluntarily?

Our evaluation by University of Essex showed that whilst the half game rule was widely adopted voluntarily in 2018-19, there are some adults who will choose not to implement it unless they have to. We want to ensure that all players get to play half a game regardless of the type of activity, their age or where they play rugby.

What do clubs, schools and colleges have to do?

Ensure that all players within your match day squad get to play at least half the game time available. You can do this using rolling substitutions and/or at set periods within the game. For example, work on quarters and plan substitutions in advance for those points in the game. Both sets of coaches should talk with the referee prior to games, to agree how best they can implement the half-game rule and other game conditions to ensure it is player centred. It is also good practice to make a note of the replacements that are made.

Please see our top 10 tips along with the Age Grade Codes of Practice to help you implement this.

Does this apply at all levels of the game and in all competition?

In age grade rugby, yes. All fixtures and competition at U18 below, in clubs, schools and colleges need to follow the half game rule.

The only exception is in the Under 18 Academy League. This is due to the unique nature of this competition, where clubs will decide on which players to offer a professional contract and therefore need to see them in conditions relating to the adult game.



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What happens if there is an injury or risk of injury?

This supersedes the rule. If a player is injured they must be removed – their safety and well-being always comes first.

What happens if it is unsafe for a player to play?

All players in a match day squad should be fully trained, competent and confident and no player should be placed in a position where they are not competent or fully trained to safely participate in a game. For example, we wouldn't expect a player who has never practiced the tackle, to be asked to do full contact in a match. Half game doesn't change what the good coach would do anyway. Coaches should consider what is in the best development needs of the player and how they might condition the game.

What if a player is sent off or gets a yellow card?

A player who is sent off, or where the referee asks the coach to remove them, does not need to play half a game – their involvement in the match is over once ordered from the field. Time spent in the sin bin after a yellow card should still be included as part of their game time.

What about our less able players? Won't this cost us the game?

Players of all abilities are just as important as each other. Being part of the team is what is important to them, so ensuring that they get half a game will directly support what they want from rugby. Research shows that being on the pitch is far more important to Age Grade players than the result of the match.

Playing in matches, making mistakes and learning from them is how all players learn and develop. Players, regardless of ability, tell us they want to play and that playing increases their competence, enjoyment and therefore likelihood to continue.

In addition, the University of Essex research study showed that the half game rule did not impact the result of games.

Won't the 'better' Age Grade player leave if they are being replaced or playing in what they perceive is a weaker team when others are brought on?

Players tell us that being part of a team and playing with their friends is the most important thing to them. Coaches, parents and teammates should set the tone for the half-game rule explaining that it is aimed at ensuring more players want to stay in the group and that you can keep on playing rugby and having fun together.

All players want to play and maximise their game time, however the pilot showed that enjoyment for all players who took part in half game were higher than those that did not. Evidence shows also that the 'best players' are those at risk of being overplayed and therefore fatigued, so good player management using half game can mitigate this. Finally, good coaches will provide these players with a challenge and rewards to support their teammates.

What about a player who has not been training – doesn't this reward them?

Half game doesn't stop a club/school having a policy around training and playing. But it does give a coach a great tool with which to highlight this further and specifically point out the fairness of a situation.

It provides an opportunity to get a less committed trainer further involved. It is important to remember that there are potentially a large number of reasons for this, and we'd recommend a conversation with the parent / player to agree what's in their best interests and development.

What if a game is cut short?

This is rare but does sometimes happen due to reasons out of our control. Every effort should be made to avoid this (e.g. ensuring points differential doesn't lead to a game being stopped). Coaches should think ahead to ensure that players had opportunity to play ahead of it. For example, making replacements at half time or earlier.



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What happens if a team does not follow the half-game rule?

This is now RFU regulation for all Age Grade Rugby. If teams do not follow this rule please raise this concern to their Constituent Body (for clubs), County Schools Union (for schools) or England Colleges Rugby Football Union (for college teams) who will investigate and take action as needed.

What happens if the other team reduces squad numbers?

This directly conflicts with what the players tell us is most important to them – being part of the team. By playing reduced numbers to try to negate the rule, it will lead to player dissatisfaction and not aid their development – it may also lead to overplaying of the rest of their team.

We encourage parents/guardians of these players to challenge coaches/teachers who do this. Some competition rules will set minimum numbers and this should be followed up with the competition organiser.



I am a referee, what can I do to support the half-game rule?

Referees, like all others involved in Age Grade rugby, have a key role in supporting a great player experience.

Referees should agree with coaches from both teams prior to the game, how they wish to implement the half-game rule – i.e. rolling subs, or during set breaks. Referees can help by reminding coaches of this as the game progresses. They can also be in a good position to identify where players are not getting half a game.

We are not asking referees to enforce this locally by stopping the game or awarding sanctions, but they command a respect that can play an important part in helping players to benefit from the half game rule.

I am a competition organiser – what do I need to do?

This is now a regulation and is therefore included within all Age Grade competition rules. You should work with your CB, CSU or England Colleges to agree what happens in your competition for those who don't follow this or any regulation.

What is the role of parents?

Parents play a vital role in driving the benefits of the half game rule for our players. In New Zealand this was a key factor for the success of the implementation with parents working closely with coaches / teachers to manage half game locally. We'd strongly encourage dialogue between coaches and parents on this and on the wider development of the player.

Where the half game rule is already implemented in clubs and schools, many coaches/teachers set out the expectations a parent/player should have and actively ask the parents to challenge them if they believe they are not sticking to those expectations.