

## Frequently Asked Question: 2020 Small Blacks Changes

### Why are we making these changes?

NZR is always looking to improve the quality of the playing experience at all levels with player enjoyment and safety being the priority above everything else. Recruiting players through Rippa Rugby has been increasingly successful, however, we have increasing challenges in retaining players from Under 11s onwards.

A 2019 review of the Small Blacks Development Model has indicated that some changes are necessary for rugby to be more player centric with greater focus on player development and engagement. This is best achieved by smaller sided games that enable more opportunities for all players to run, pass, and catch the ball and score tries.

### What are the changes?

In 2020, Under 11s rugby will be played at 10 a side on a ½ field (40m x 60m). This represents no change for those that have been playing Under 10s rugby in 2019. NZR, in partnership with a number of Provincial Unions and a university, will be trialling 10-a-side rugby for Under 12 and Under 13 on various field widths to test what improvement this can make to player development and engagement. This will influence further enhancements from 2021 to improve player development and enhancement.

### How do we know that these changes will be successful?

Rugby is a late development sport with player maturation not occurring until late teens. There is therefore time to develop players slowly and simply. NZR research from other National Unions has reinforced that young player development and engagement is best achieved by small sided games that emphasize and promote more ball handling, evasion skills, and decision making.

England Rugby's research at a similar age group comparing 9-a-side rugby against a 8-a-side version indicated a 20% increase of ball in play though faster recycling of the ball, over 50% reduction of the time of the ball held in rucks and mauls, and a reduction in time committed to setting up scrums and lineouts.

The research also indicated that there was a significant greater number of offloads. Player feedback from those participating in the England Rugby trials reported running with the ball and tackling as the most enjoyable aspect.

### **What are we expecting to achieve?**

- Increased player development in key skills - run, catch, pass, evade, and decision making.
- Increased player opportunities to be involved in key skills and influence the game.
- Increased playing time with more tries.
- Improved player retention from Under 11s.
- Improved coach retention.
- Less emphasis on 'roles' and structures and more emphasis on deliberate play.
- Less emphasis on formal restarts such as scrums and lineouts.

### **Will these changes impact on 10 year old's sense of fun in rugby?**

Children essentially play sport for fun and their mates with less emphasis on winning and formal systems of play. Research from rugby and other sports indicates that a shift to smaller sided games does not negatively impact a young player's sense of fun. Players' cognitive development at this point is still not fully advanced so their game experience is best enhanced by deliberate play where they participate in games with simple rules and low emphasis on formal structures (playing roles) and systems (tactics).

### **What are other countries doing?**

World Rugby empowers individual Unions to develop their own player development approach up to Under 19s. Whilst each nation will have its own approach based on its playing philosophy and player needs, there are many areas of commonality for which Unions collaborate to achieve best practice and advance the game globally. The English and Scottish Rugby Unions have invested in considerable research over the past decade and developed more player centric approaches to promote greater playing time, more touches on the ball, and a greater focus on find space rather than looking for contact. Their findings have validated a lot of NZR's recent work in this space which supports the shift to playing smaller sided games for longer in the Small Blacks Development Model.

## Frequently Asked Questions: QuickRip Rugby for Small Blacks

### **Why is non-contact rugby important?**

Rippa Rugby has been a really successful addition to the rugby experience for young players up to seven years old. Beyond this, there are no options for players that would prefer not to transition to tackle grades at Under 8 due to preference, physical development, or confidence. This creates challenges for retaining players. Providing a non-contact pathway provides an opportunity for more players to stay in the game for longer and transition at a later point or possibly continue playing a non-contact version for life.

### **Will non-contact rugby impact negatively on players' ability to transition to tackle rugby at a later point?**

Non-contact rugby will still preserve the key skills of run, catch, pass, throw, scrums and lineouts. England Rugby research indicates that there is a greater emphasis on evasion, increased passing, and engagement which are all considered positive for player development and player engagement. For those wishing to transition to tackle grades at a later point, NZR and the Provincial Unions provide programmes such as Tackle Clinic and Front Row Factory to provide competence and confidence in these specific skills.

### **What are the benefits of non-contact rugby?**

Non-contact rugby provides a safe, inclusive and enjoyable rugby experience that can be played by children, teenagers, and adults. The reduced contact means that physical capabilities are less dominant and players across a broader age span can play together without fear of mismatch. It is becoming an increasingly popular rugby option in Secondary Schools for teenagers with over 80 schools participating in QuickRip tournaments in 2018.