

## National Governing Bodies playing their part

National Governing Bodies have an important role to play in the success of Sportivate. They also have much to gain from the programme and the early indications are that the NGBs that have pro-actively engaged with CSPs and local agencies are reaping the rewards.



### Introduction

Rugby has been a prime example of this during the first six months of the programme. The Rugby Football Union has developed a product which ideally suits the Sportivate target market. Touch rugby has been designed to appeal to adults as a fun, social and flexible way of keeping fit. Peter Bath, National Students Development Manager at the RFU, says Sportivate is helping to re-enforce a strategy which is now 18 months old.

Sportivate meets a need identified by recent research into the needs and ambitions of rugby clubs. RFU development staff have been tasked with identifying and

**“Sportivate fits our focus and priorities – it helps us to recruit new players and to encourage them into clubs.”** Peter Bath, RFU.

supporting local innovation.

This has been particularly successful where officers have built a close working relationship with a CSP. Examples of good practice have been shared between county development officers so that knowledge of what works can be shared around the network. RFU staff have worked to build links between Sportivate activity and other initiatives aimed at the age group.



Through its 'Choose Rugby' marketing campaign, the RFU is encouraging people to find a rugby club and start, restart or carry on playing rugby, either in the traditional 15-a-side game or in modified short and non-contact versions of the game like touch, tag or sevens. Early local success was bolstered by a national competition [www.facebook.com/chooserrugby](http://www.facebook.com/chooserrugby) for which players filmed a clip of themselves during the Sportivate sessions and uploaded it with a chance to play in a tournament at Twickenham ahead of the international between England and Argentina.

**"What and amazing day at Twickenham. Thanks to everyone who made it so special."** Rob Amson via Facebook

## Local innovation

The [Plymouth RFU Touch Rugby Activity Programme](#) aimed to promote the game and a local club, but also to increase awareness of the health and social advantages playing rugby. The project, based at Plymstock Albion Oaks, featured a series of six weekly fun competitions. Teams were sourced from local schools, businesses and the wider community. The winning team was then invited to a county festival final and all participants signposted into the club structure to play either touch or full contact rugby. The project retained twenty participants during the Sportivate sessions and has acted as a catalyst for the club's wider efforts to boost membership. The club has recruited a number of new female players and has managed to encourage people who have never played the game to come along and give it a try. Additionally, they have recaptured some former players who are now ready to sign up for the club's veteran's squad. There are now plans to build on the momentum and start a touch rugby league.

In **Suffolk** local pubs were invited to enter a mixed gender squad of ten players to play in a round robin tournament. Publicans played an important role in recruiting players. After every Sunday session the six pubs involved took it in turns to host a social gathering which encouraged many of the teams to bond and gain new friendships. Woodbridge Rugby Club worked with Suffolk Coastal District Council and the RFU to develop and promote the project. The first session included an introduction to the rules and coaching from Club coach Drew Fautley. The Club hosted a celebration finals events at their ground and encouraged the new players to feel part of the club, even forming an informal 'barbarians' team as a means of experienced players helping the new recruits to fit into the club structure. The project retained 53 new players and the club now offers the chance to play contact or touch rugby.

**"It started as a fun bit of exercise on a Sunday afternoon but it has grown fast to become a regular entertainment for supporters as well as sparking friendly rivalry amongst the pubs of Woodbridge. We never imagined it would give ten of us the chance to play on the hallowed turf ... at Twickenham!"**. Karen Fletcher.

The **Humber 'Oddly Shaped Balls' project** attracted 14 to 16 year olds with the primary aim of developing a new under 16 team that could participate in the local league. This need was identified by the school sports partnership in liaison with local schools and youth groups in conjunction with the Humberside Police youth diversion officer. The positive publicity surrounding the project in the local press helped to boost numbers in other age groups and a future Sportivate project is now planned to target 17 and 18 year olds. By November 2011 the Grimsby Telegraph was carrying the story of Cleethorpes RUFC attracting it's one hundredth player to the initiative.



The **Lancashire Women's Rugby project** started with a fresher's fair and touch rugby recruitment initiatives aimed at bringing rugby union to the University of Cumbria. The project helped to challenge preconceptions about rugby and brought the University together with Vale of Lune RUFC whose training facilities were used for the project. The project has captured the enthusiasm of 19 young women of which two have now made it to the Lancashire Senior Women's team. The University has also played its first BUCS fixture against a Lancaster University 3<sup>rd</sup> year team. The

success of the project has meant that more new players want to take part in the sessions and has improved the connections between the RFU, university and local clubs. There are now plans to replicate the project with other clubs throughout Lancaster as a stimulus to setting up more women's teams.

### The critical success factors

- O2 touch rugby is an attractive product with which to introduce the sport and to challenge pre-conceptions about it
- Embracing the social element of team sports is vital to making it attractive
- Getting non traditional local partners on board - such as pub landlords – can help to sell the sport in new ways
- Sportivate touch rugby projects have been held at a variety of locations but have been most successful where a local rugby club has been keen to get involved
- As always, good coaches can inspire and motivate the participants to stay involved
- Getting experienced players involved in Sportivate projects (as informal mentors) can help the new participants feel more comfortable and to settle into the club environment
- Using a major event and social media campaign (such as the RFU 'choose rugby' campaign) can offer attractive incentives
- Getting local press interest really makes participants feel valued and helps with retention
- The RFU acted as 'sponsor' and donated prizes and incentives throughout the projects and managed to build awareness of its role and contribution throughout each of the projects.

**A well tailored product, good local connections, innovative marketing and friendly coaches and club members have helped to make touch rugby a success in a number of settings.**

