

# Rugby Union Grassroots Programme

Ages 6 to 16 · RFU Kids First & England Rugby Age Grade Regulations 2026

Built on research from the RFU Kids First coaching framework, England Rugby Age Grade Regulations 2026 (Season 2026-27 confirmed from 5 September 2026), Rugby Coach Weekly, Sportplan and World Rugby. **Ken Snelson is a former professional rugby league player — this programme highlights key union differences so any coach can deliver it confidently.**

## Rugby Union vs Rugby League — Key Differences for Coaches

<b>Players per team</b>	13 (league) vs 15 (union). Extra positions: two flankers, second prop. Different defensive and attacking patterns.
<b>Tackling and Ruck</b>	In union, tackled player must release the ball. Rucks and mauls form — competing for the ball is legal and central to the game. No 6-tackle rule.
<b>Scrum</b>	Rugby union has contested scrums — forwards bind together and contest for possession. A specialist skill that must be taught safely. Does not exist in league.
<b>Lineout</b>	When ball goes into touch, lineouts form — players lift each other to contest the throw. A major set piece. Does not exist in rugby league.
<b>Kicking Game</b>	More varied kicking in union — box kick, Garryowen, grubber, chip, cross-field. Kicking for touch from penalties is a major part of game management.
<b>Points Scoring</b>	Union: Try 5pts, Conversion 2pts, Penalty 3pts, Drop goal 3pts. League: Try 4pts, Conversion 2pts.

## RFU Age Grade Overview — 2026 Regulations

Age Group	Format	Field / Team	Key Development Focus
<b>U6 / U7</b>	Tag / No contact	Quarter pitch · 5–7/side	Fun, ball carry, evasion, tag technique
<b>U8 / U9</b>	Mini rugby — modified contact	Half pitch · 7/side	Running lines, passing, support play
<b>U10 / U11</b>	Mini rugby — full contact	Half pitch · 9/side	Safe tackle, ball presentation, ruck entry
<b>U12 / U13</b>	Junior rugby — uncontested scrum	Full pitch · 12/side	Scrum technique, lineout basics, positional roles
<b>U14</b>	Full 15-a-side, contested scrum	Full pitch · 15/side	All set pieces, patterns of play, game management
<b>U15 / U16</b>	Full 15-a-side — league permitted	Full pitch · 15/side	Advanced tactics, strength, leadership

## Positions Guide — Helping Young Players Find Their Role

No.	Position	Role	Ideal Qualities
<b>1 &amp; 3</b>	Props	Anchor scrum, carry in contact, support at ruck	Strength, low body position, physicality

2	Hooker	Throw lineout, strike in scrum, carry	Accuracy, work rate, communication
4 & 5	Locks	Engine of scrum, lineout jumpers, ball carriers	Height, strength, stamina
6 & 7	Flankers	Contest breakdown, carry, tackle, cover	Work rate, aggression, tackling
8	Number 8	Pick from scrum, carry, link forwards and backs	Power, ball skills, leadership
9	Scrum Half	Pass from ruck and scrum, box kick, link	Quick hands, decision-making, speed
10	Fly Half	Control game, kick, pass, direct attacks	Vision, kicking, communication
11 & 14	Wingers	Finish tries, kick chase, counter attack	Pace, finishing, aerial ability
12 & 13	Centres	Carry, tackle, create space for wingers	Power, passing, defensive organisation
15	Fullback	Last line of defence, kick receipt, counter attack	Positional awareness, catching, pace

## 90-Minute Session Plan Template — All Age Groups

Time	Activity	Purpose	Coach Note
0–10 mins	Dynamic warm-up — jog, high knees, side shuffles, ball familiarisation games	Prepare body, raise heart rate	High energy — every player with a ball
10–20 mins	Speed and agility — cone drills, reaction starts, change of direction	Athletic foundations, footwork	Keep it competitive — race format
20–35 mins	Skill block 1 — tackle technique or ball presentation	Core safety skill, build confidence	Demonstrate first, always use pads for beginners
35–50 mins	Skill block 2 — passing patterns, support lines, ruck entry	Technical skill applied with movement	Short explanation, lots of practice repetitions
50–65 mins	Set piece — scrum or lineout (U12+) or small-sided passing game (U6–U11)	Game-specific skill development	Patience — set pieces take time to learn
65–80 mins	Conditioned game — 7v7 or full match	Apply all skills in game context	Let them play, coach from the side
80–85 mins	Cool down — jog, stretches	Physical recovery	Quiet and calm — wind them down
85–90 mins	Team huddle — two positives, one to improve	Build confidence, set goals	Find a positive for every player

● Attacker

■ Defender

▲ Cone

→ Run

□ Pass

## Top Drills for Rugby Union — With Pitch Diagrams

1

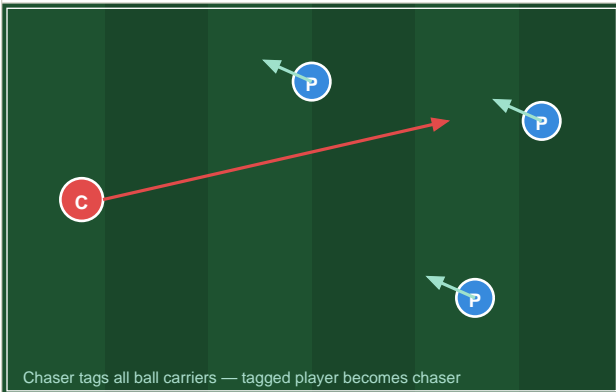
# Pac-Man Tag

U6-U10

Ball in hand

All active

Whole group



● SKILL FOCUS

Ball carrying while evading chasers — evasion and awareness

● GAME TRANSFER

Evasion, ball security and spatial awareness in open play

● COACHING CUE

"Keep your eyes up — find the space!"

★ RFU Kids First — perfect first drill for any age group

2

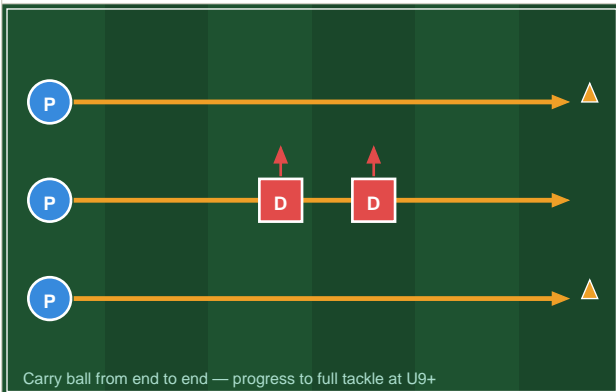
# Bulldog (Ball Carry)

U6-U12

Ball carriers

Defenders tag/tackle

End to end



● SKILL FOCUS

Direct ball carrying, contact confidence, drive through

● GAME TRANSFER

Developing the directness and contact confidence every forward needs

● COACHING CUE

"Two hands on the ball — drive through!"

3

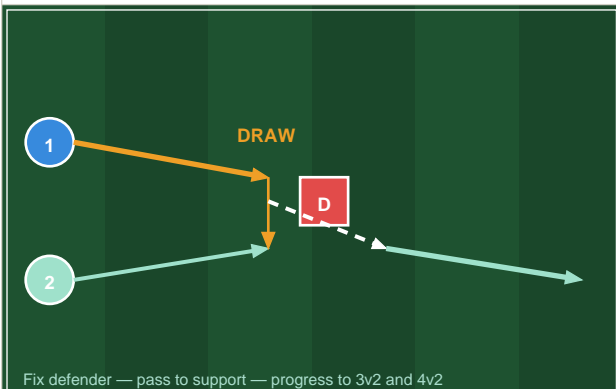
# 2v1 Attack

U9-U16

2 attackers

1 defender

Progress to 3v2



● SKILL FOCUS

Fixing the defender, passing to support, running lines

● GAME TRANSFER

The fundamental attack drill used in every professional academy in the world

● COACHING CUE

"Fix him — then give it!"

# 4

## Safe Tackle Progression

U9–U16

Stationary → walk → jog

Pads first

Build over weeks



### SKILL FOCUS

Safe tackle body position, cheek-to-cheek, arm wrap, drive

### GAME TRANSFER

The most important safety skill in rugby — built progressively

### COACHING CUE

"Body low, arms around — drive through!"

# 5

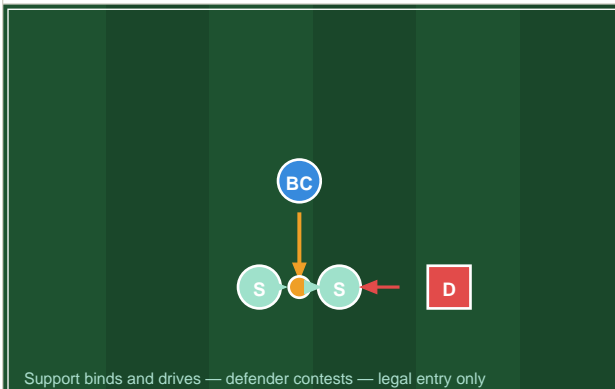
## Ruck Entry Drill

U12–U16

Ball carrier goes down

Support binds and drives

Defender contests



### SKILL FOCUS

Legal ruck entry, body position, contest at the breakdown

### GAME TRANSFER

Winning ruck ball is the foundation of every attacking set in union

### COACHING CUE

"Gate entry — bind tight — drive over!"

# 6

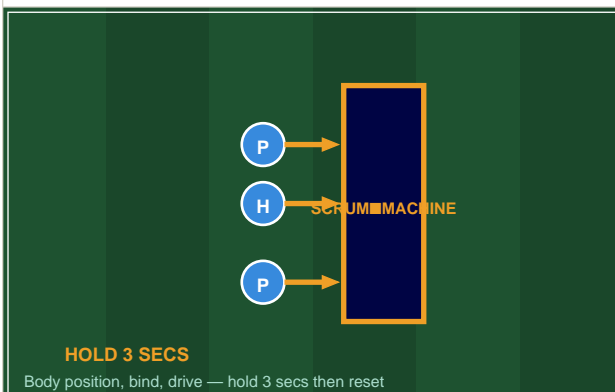
## Scrum Machine Circuit

U12–U16

Body position

Drive and hold 3 secs

8 reps then reset



### SKILL FOCUS

Scrummaging technique, body position, leg drive

### GAME TRANSFER

Building scrummaging power and technique safely — no live scrums for beginners

### COACHING CUE

"Crouch, bind, set — low and drive!"

## 7

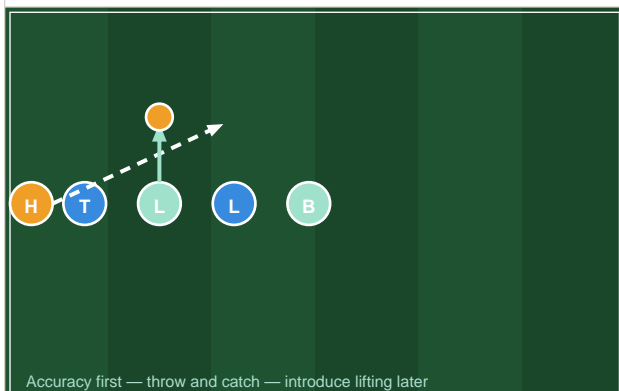
## Lineout Throw and Catch

U12–U16

Throw accuracy

Stationary then jumping

Lifting introduced last



## ● SKILL FOCUS

Lineout throw accuracy, jumping and catching technique

## ● GAME TRANSFER

The lineout is a major set piece in union — accuracy wins possession

## ● COACHING CUE

"Aim for the hands — straight and true!"

## Strength &amp; Conditioning — Ages 11 to 16

Exercise	Age	Sets x Reps	Rugby Union Benefit
Bodyweight squat	11–12	3 x 15	Leg strength for scrum drive and tackling
Press-ups (wide grip)	11+	3 x 15	Chest and pushing power for scrummaging
Plank hold	11+	3 x 45 secs	Core stability for contact resistance
Goblet squat	13–16	3 x 12	Quad and glute strength for scrum and lineout
Dumbbell bench press	13–16	3 x 10	Upper body push for scrum and ruck
Pull-ups / lat pulldown	13–16	3 x 8	Upper body pull for lineout lifting
Romanian deadlift	13–16	3 x 10	Hamstring and glute strength, tackle drive
Barbell back squat	15–16	4 x 6–8	Maximum leg strength for scrum, lineout, sprint
Power clean	15–16	3 x 4	Explosive power for lineout lifting and sprinting
Nordic curl	13+	3 x 6	Hamstring strength — critical injury prevention
Neck strengthening	13+	3 x 15 each	Protects against head and neck injury in contact

## Ken's Tips — What Rugby League and Rugby Union Have in Common

**The game is the teacher**

Whether it's league or union — the best coaches let players play. Drills develop technique but games develop intelligence. Always finish with a game.

**Every player must feel valued**

The modern game — in both codes — is built on respect and inclusion. Every player at every session must feel they belong.

**Contact confidence is built slowly**

Whether it's a ruck in union or a tackle in league — confidence in contact is built over weeks and months, not in one session.

**Simplicity wins**

The greatest coaches I played under kept their instructions to three words. 'Hold your shape.' 'Support the ball.' 'Play what's in front of you.'

**Fun first — always**

At ages 6 to 16 the number one job of a rugby coach is to make a child love the game. Everything else comes second.

