



# PARENT NETWORK GUIDE

Athletes across the country want to play rugby. People are drawn to the sport because families as a whole can find enjoyment in being involved with a rugby program. USA Rugby has developed this guide for administrators to use in establishing a rugby parent volunteer network. It is through the accomplishments of volunteers that competitive, safe and fun rugby takes place. This guide helps explain the following:

- Importance of building a parent network
- How to build a parent network
- Roles and responsibilities of network members
- What administrative tools are needed

## **Why build a parent network?**

Parents will support their child's rugby club as they overcome fears associated with being involved. A single parent may start out as the head coach, chief administrator, travel coordinator and school representative requiring an overwhelming level of commitment. When faced with this insurmountable workload, parents feel they can not perform so they choose not to participate. The key to overcoming this fear is to recruit parents with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Creating a network allows parents to feel like part of a team instead of an overwhelmed well-intentioned individual. Support from multiple organized parents provides efficient program management.

All programs rely on coaches to lead them to success. Coaches take on the burden of planning practices, match day preparation, and ensuring the safety of players among many other duties. If they must attend to the tedious administrative tasks in addition to these basic requirements they are likely to quit or refuse the job in the first place. A parent network can provide volunteer coaches with the opportunity to focus solely on the craft of coaching thereby improving the overall playing experience. Providing coaches the freedom to only coach makes parents an extremely valuable asset.

In addition to these key factors, a parent network can also:

- Encourage players and parents to share a common interest in rugby
- Educate young people on efficient management processes
- Make use of skill sets beyond the reach of the head coach
- Provide an opportunity to network and make friends
- Promote rugby as a community game
- Create greater awareness of the sport

As the number of youth rugby players continues to grow in the USA, so too does the need for involved parents. Without adequate parental involvement teams will face difficulty in fulfilling their obligations. It is imperative that parents take ownership to create continuity within the program.

## **How do I build a parent network?**

To any parent, the decision to allow their child to play rugby can be swayed by public opinion. The myth that rugby is a dangerous game is perpetrated by injuries caused by improper instruction and skill application. Administrators and coaches must educate parents about the game to dispel these misconceptions. The game itself requires physical fitness, courage and grace under pressure. Each of these traits is what parents wish to see in their children. To help portray this image of the game, club representatives must present a professional appearance to those who wish to become involved. Winning the trust and respect from parents and community members starts with organizing and conducting an official parent involvement meeting.

## **Planning a Parent Meeting**

Parents often rely on first impressions. This first meeting is a chance to showcase rugby as a professional and international sport rich in tradition. Nothing turns a family away more than attending a disorganized and inefficient meeting with little to no follow through. To ensure parents have a positive first experience, club representatives should consider the following factors:

*Who is the target audience?*

*What location and timing will work best?*

*How do we market and promote the first meeting?*

*What materials will you plan to offer and present?*

*What goals and objectives should be set for this meeting?*

Compare addressing these key factors to solving a jigsaw puzzle. As each question is answered, they form independent pieces that fit together to achieve success. An example is if attendance at the meeting is inadequate due to lack of promotion, then discussions on goals and objectives will prove to be difficult. Answering these basic questions is the first step towards preparing a successful parent meeting.

## **Target Audience**

The first step in planning a parent meeting is to decide who will be invited. A parent meeting may be called to setup a new organizational structure versus hosting a new player recruitment meeting to generate interest in the sport. Choosing a target audience is necessary for promotion as well as setting goals and objectives. If the right group of people associated with the club is in attendance, it will greatly increase the rate of success.

## **Location and Timing**

Once who have chosen a target audience, the next step is to assess where and when the meeting will take place. Picking a location that offers the least amount of travel and is familiar to the athletes and parents is best. When choosing a date and time it is best to consult with current players on school and community activities to avoid any potential conflicts. As many athletes are cross-over sport athletes it is also smart to consult with other sport coaches on their scheduled activities. Making the first contact can even transition into discussing how rugby can help athletes perform better in other sports. Community leaders such as teachers, youth group coordinators, and recreational professionals also appreciate being informed and may even help promote events that encourage athletic endeavors. Based on information gathered from other organizations an educated decision may be made on a time and place for the first meeting.

## **Promotion**

To help ensure high attendance, it is important to promote the meeting. Once decisions have been made regarding time and place then the key is to spread the word. It is best to give at least two weeks notice to the public prior to the event. Start communicating internally with current members of the club via email or hold a short “players only” meeting. This provides an opportunity to empower current players to participate in recruiting prospective players and their family members. USA Rugby has pre-made promotional posters and additional tools available for this purpose at [www.usarugby.org/goto/Youth\\_High\\_School](http://www.usarugby.org/goto/Youth_High_School).

School bulletin boards, morning announcements and people in positions of authority such as teachers and other sport coaches can be used by the current athletes and coaches to send the message. Looking beyond the school environment through the use of local newspapers, park and recreation publications, and community service activities also serve to bring new people in. Having a critical mass of enthusiastic parents and players in attendance can ease the process of achieving the club goals and objectives.

## **Presentation**

The first meeting is often rated by the quality of information provided to those in attendance. An experienced facilitator sets the tone, while proper materials support what is being communicated. Providing materials makes it simple to share necessary information and adds an image of professionalism to the event. Suggested materials include:

- Nametags/Markers/Pens
- Laptop/PC

- Spectator guides
- Promotional posters
- Contact information attendance form
- Club specific promotional flyer and/or business cards
- Calendar of events (includes matches, training sessions, fundraisers, other major events)
- Signage directing attendants to the meeting location
- Visual presentation materials (power point, film clips, posters, etc.)
- Copies of the meeting agenda
- Refreshments

Every attendant should leave the assembly feeling informed by the materials provided and excited about taking on a new sport. Creating an itemized agenda that addresses the goals and objectives of the club helps maximize this impact.

### Goals and Objectives

A discussion must take place between key members of the current coaching staff, parents and athletes themselves to develop a meeting agenda. The agenda must inform, address needs of the athletes and club as a whole and inject organizational structure designed to combat any issues. A sample agenda features:

- **Introduction to Rugby:** Explain what the game is in general. Help a current player prepare a brief introductory presentation on rugby. Use information provided in the Spectators Guide to Rugby provided by USA Rugby to share some technical information. It is also appropriate to use visual aids such as match footage or samples of equipment to generate interest and enthusiasm.
- **Introduction to the Club:** Make it a point to have all attendants exchange greetings. Ensuring that new and current players and family members intermix provides a better overall social atmosphere. A verbal and/or visual presentation describing the history of the club, introducing the coaching staff and highlighting major accomplishments will serve to answer initial questions from parents and players.
- **Competitive Season Information:** A discussion on team goals and expectations for players should occur. Review the schedule of training sessions, matches, meetings and other activities requiring attendance. Include dues payment information and travel requirements to ensure commitment. Also address the physical requirements of the sport and what players can do to prepare themselves to play at their best.
- **Safety Considerations:** This is one of the most important issues addressed. Make the qualifications of the coaching staff known to all parents. Describe some of the proper contact techniques and discuss injury prevention strategies as knowledge lessens the fear factor. Compare rugby to sports such as football to highlight differences in contact situations. Use articles and studies provided by USA Rugby as a resource to help answer parental safety concerns. Answer as many questions as it takes to make parents feel comfortable with rugby. Further explain that the primary responsibility of the referee in any match is to ensure the safety of the athletes.
- **Roles and Responsibilities of Parents:** Making parents understand that they are a key factor in club operations must be made clear. Start by describing how saddling a coach with administrative responsibilities in addition to the technical requirements of coaching can create a negative environment. Emphasize what good a shared working environment can do in creating a positive club culture. Present a pre-approved set of positions and describe the responsibilities assigned to each role. Some suggested roles for parent volunteers include:
  - *Assistant Coach* – helps to instruct players and club members on technical aspects of rugby. The level of involvement depends on the individual knowledge base and level of qualification.
  - *Executive Director/President* – leads all organizational meetings and oversees club operations.

- *Vice President* – assists in managing club operations and provides oversight in absence of the appointed leader.
  - *Match Secretary* – handles match scheduling and interfaces with opponents and coaching staff to ensure integrity in competition.
  - *Secretary* - responsible for all USA Rugby membership requirements and overall club communication.
  - *Treasurer* – manages financial arrangements including club payments, purchases and revenue generation.
  - *Travel Coordinator* – manages functions of transportation to and from matches ranging from ground travel to accommodations.
  - *Social Chair* – acts with a committee of volunteers to arrange post match functions and other off field activities.
  - *Fundraising Coordinator* – creates and implements plans to raise money for the club.
  - *Culture Keeper* – encourages behavior in line with the ethos of the game.
  - *Media Representative* – reports match results and acts as a liaison to all local media outlets.
- **Committees:** The general responsibility of each role listed is to ensure that the club continues to take actions in their area of expertise that provide the opportunity for players to play rugby. In addition to these key roles, various clubs may adopt committees to address specific needs of the club. These committees are responsible for carrying out these tasks so the end goal of rugby participation is achieved. Some example of committees include:
- *Fundraising Committee* – seek to reduce the cost of participation.
  - *Recruitment Committee* – help recruit new players and families into the game.
  - *Social Committee* – organizes and communicates with other clubs on how best to create a fun off-field atmosphere especially during the post match time period.
  - *Equipment Committee* – responsible for the condition and storage of all club equipment
  - *Match Day Committee* – manages field appointments, field markings, equipment, uniforms, officiating and all other tasks associated with match day participation.
  - *Competition Committee* – arrange and provide medical staff and materials, ensure athletes have proper hydration, and provide competition tools for coaches and players such as game film or statistics.
- **Request for volunteers:** These examples of administrative positions and work groups form a strong parent network. A chart or graph outlining the organizational structure as a whole will help in explaining the responsibilities of each position. Ask for volunteers and assign roles based on background information and known strengths of each individual. Use what parents do in their daily lives to help guide these assignments. Ex. A parent working as an accountant makes for a qualified club treasurer.
- **Questions:** Following each presentation, allow plenty of time for an open forum. Parents will have questions as they wish to ensure their son or daughter will be safe and have fun while playing rugby. Be patient and thorough in all explanations. Create a parent/player centered environment to ensure an adequate comfort level. An unanswered question can be the turning point in a parent/player's decision to participate.

- **Call to Action:** After all questions have been exhausted take this opportunity to leave on a note of excitement. This is the final chance to show in your inflection why rugby is a great sport. Close by reminding everyone the date training starts or discuss a future date for the next assembly. An action-oriented statement energizes, promotes commitment and leaves club members interested in taking part in future activities.
  
- **Available Resources:** Many references have been made in this guide to resources made available by USA Rugby. The following is a list of available materials that will prove useful in planning and conducting organizational club events. These items are available at the USA Rugby youth homepage at [www.usarugby.org/goto/Youth\\_High\\_School](http://www.usarugby.org/goto/Youth_High_School).
  - Club Start Up Guide
  - Spectator Guide
  - Youth Development Guide
  - Promotional Posters
  - Physical Education Curriculum
  - Youth Rules Connection
  - Safety Documentation
  - Local Area Contact Information
  - Registration Instructions
  - National rugby press coverage and event details
  - And much more!

Please use and personalize the documents available in the parent network appendix as needed. A wealth of best practice documents are also available serving as testimonials of what has worked for established programs across the USA. For additional information contact USA Rugby at [youth@usarugby.org](mailto:youth@usarugby.org). Parents who take part in creating sustainable programs play a key role in making rugby the best experience in American sports.