

Reviewer: 2

Comments to the Author

Thank you once again for the opportunity to review this manuscript. Unfortunately I cannot accept the manuscript for the following reasons;

- You have accused me conducting a personal attack, for stating my personal opinions, and for attempting to alter your argument. My hope (for previous 2 rounds of review) was that you would modify your argument towards a more neutral, inclusive search for solutions while still including your proposal to ban the tackle as a potential option. The main aim of a manuscript such as this is to debate and search for/consider all of the possible solutions before making a drastic change to a fundamental part of the game.
- The thrust of this manuscript should be towards (1) encouraging the RFU and the remaining unions within the UK to establish more controlled, targeted and effective injury prevention programmes which have already shown to make a significant impact in other rugby-playing nations, and (2) to eliminate the compulsory participation of schoolboys in contact rugby in schools. This completely unacceptable.
- You continue to select evidence that suits your argument and misconstrue Tucker's statements. For example, stating in your most recent response that "Tucker et al state that there are no studies on tackle technique or proficiency in the youth game. It is our view that given the available knowledge of the high risk of injury in rugby and its association with the tackle, such studies would be unlikely to ethically approved for children." However, Tucker did actually make reference to tackle technique research (including the promising initial findings), and a plethora of studies pertinent injury surveillance and epidemiological research have been ethically approved (and will continue to be approved) and conducted using youth rugby cohorts. Further examples of inconsistencies can be provided.

RESPONSE

We have been advised by the editor to deal only with "factual elements". On the iissue of tackle technique, please revised section under "Risk mitigation".

- You have made inconsistent claims that the tackle should only be introduced at a later stage i.e. when it is safe to do so. On questioning this notion (on several occasions), you reverted to a belief that contact rugby in schools must be banned altogether. However, you have stated that contact rugby may continue in youth cohorts playing club rugby. I realise that you have jurisdiction over the school system, however, this seems counterintuitive, as the risk is not being eliminated. It is simply going to bottleneck/filter into the club system as a result of a propagation of youth club players who wish to continue contact rugby.

RESPONSE

The government ministers have jurisdiction over schools, not rugby clubs. Therefore as a public health approach this is where we are aiming our arguments. As we have shown there is no evidence in rugby that such an approach will lead to an increase in injuries later on, most children give up rugby on leaving school.