

IRFU Age Grade Mini Rugby

Mini Rugby Festival Guidelines 2025-2026



Mini Rugby (LTPD Stage 1)

“The ethos of mini rugby is to foster and develop young players (boys & girls) of all ability in the game of rugby in a safe, non-competitive, enjoyable environment through activities which ensure progressive skill development for all participants in line with the IRFU LTPD (Long Term Player Development) pathway, Child Welfare Policy and Traditions of Rugby Union”

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Pre-festival
3. Festival Personnel
4. On the day information
5. Provision of Medical Cover
6. Start & finish time
7. Festival timings
8. Draw structure
9. Pitch dimension
10. General Information
11. Sample match schedule
12. IRFU Festival application form

1. Introduction

For ease of understanding the word Festival has been used throughout this document to represent any, gathering (4 or more clubs) of mini rugby teams in a multi club format. Festival replaces the use of the phrases tournament, competition or mini club blitz.

Utilising the information in this pack will ensure that all participants (players, coaches, parents, match officials etc.) leave the festival with a positive rugby experience as well as making your job easier as a mini rugby festival organiser.

The information contained within this guide is aligned with the IRFU's Long Term Player Development (LTPD) policy and as such is about putting the player and his/her welfare at the centre of everything we do.

The guidelines contained within this document are based on the observations of a number of different mini rugby festivals around Ireland. They take into consideration many examples of good practice observed at the festivals as well as suggestions from other sports and rugby governing bodies.

The ideas put forward in this pack refer to a minimum standard, however the resources that will be available at each club will differ and it is suggested that this booklet be used as recommendations for running a festival.

2. Pre-festival

2.1. Application for permission to host a mini festival

Prior to the festival taking place, the organising club, as per the IRFU Mini Rugby Regulations, must apply to the Branch informing them of their intention to host a Festival. This application must be submitted within a sufficient time period and written approval must be received prior to the festival taking place.

In the application the host club must provide the following information:

- Proposed date of Festival
- Number of clubs and teams taking part
- Any financial requirements to participate
- Draft programme of the day
- Expected number of participants
- Number of volunteers
- Confirmation of first aid provision
- Club Welfare Officer on duty at the event (host club CWO)

2.2. Pre-festival administration

Prior to the festival each competing team should be sent the following information from the Festival Co-Ordinator:-

- Full set of festival rules as well as the regulations (stage) to be used for the event
- Running order for the day and format of the festival
- Map outlining the pitch layout
- When and where the pre-festival briefing will be held
- List of key festival contacts
- Number of players to be invited from each team
- Contact details for participating clubs
- Participants must be informed regarding food arrangements for the festival

2.3. Pre-festival Safety Checklist

The following tasks should be carried out prior to the start of any festival:

- Safety check of the grounds prior to any games being played. This check should take into consideration issues such as checking for broken glass, needles, etc. The safety check should also ensure that any equipment on site such as scrum machines, grass cutting equipment etc. are securely locked away and cannot be accessed by children as a climbing frame etc.
- All playing areas should be clearly marked out to the appropriate size, clearly identifiable and visible
- All goal posts should be padded
- Playing enclosure roped off 5m from sideline and dead ball line
- Medical assistance available and clearly visible and should be clearly and easily accessed by all players
- All key personnel clearly identifiable
- Match balls should be provided by the host club and they should ensure that they are of the correct size
- The correct playing time for the respective player age groups should be adhered to
- Referees should be appropriately dressed and qualified
- First aid providers should be confirmed

It is the responsibility of the Festival Co-Ordinator to ensure that this safety checklist is carried out prior to the start of the festival.

3. Staff /Personnel required:

Below is a list of required roles that could be allocated to willing individuals to assist with the running of your festival. It is suggested that one person be allocated to one role only so as not to overburden volunteers. Suggested responsibilities are also included to assist you with defining an individual's role, however please feel free to add additional responsibilities where you see fit.

3.1. Festival Co-Ordinator (Number of posts: 1)

This person has overall responsibility for the festival and must ensure the smooth and safe running of the festival. All other volunteers report directly to this person and take their direction from him/her before and for the duration of the festival.

- First point of contact with respect to any query concerning the individual festival
- First point of contact with respect to player, coach or referee behaviour which contravenes the IRFU Child Welfare policy
- Responsible for conducting a pre-festival briefing with representatives of all teams participating and festival officials
- Responsible for providing a briefing to all festival volunteers so that they have a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities
- Ensures that all volunteers maintain their allocated positions throughout the duration of the festival
- Ensures that the festival runs to time and that no pitches fall behind their schedule
- Responsible for all elements of the pre-festival administration by way of invitations, match schedule etc.
- Responsible for co-ordinating any necessary action in the event of a serious incident

3.2 Pitch Co-Ordinators (Number of posts: 1 per pitch)

- Ensures that their designated pitch is properly marked, is fit for play and clearly identifiable.
- Ensure that matches on their pitch run to time by
 - Organising participating teams so that they are ready to enter the pitch at their designated time slot
 - Co-ordinating referees to ensure that they are ready to start games on time
- Ensure that adequate safety precautions are in place and that spectators and teams respect these
- Knows where the medical support is and if required be able to contact them quickly in an emergency

3.3 Announcer/ Time Keeper (Number of posts: 1)

- Matches should be started at the same time by the Announcer/Timekeeper to ensure that matches start and finish as per the schedule. As no injury/extra time is permitted teams should use roll on substitutions
- The announcer/ time keeper starts all matches, stops them at half time, restarts the second half and stops matches by use of an air horn or, if available PA system. Referees do not need to keep time
- It is recommended that there are a maximum of 5 teams per pitch in order for each team to participate in 4 matches on the day. This will also ensure that the entire festival takes a maximum of 4 hours to complete

3.4 Catering Supervisor – where appropriate (Number of posts: 1)

- Oversees the running of all catering facilities and ensures that all participants including players and referees are quickly and adequately fed as per their allocation

3.5 First Aid Co-Ordinator (Number of posts: 1)

- Responsible for ensuring that there is adequate first aid cover on site for the duration of the festival
- Ensures that first aid provision is clearly identifiable
- Ensures that coaches of all participating teams know where first aid can be accessed
- Liaises with the professional first aid cover and ensures that all of their requirements are met by the host club

3.6 Car Park Co-Ordinator – where appropriate (Number of posts: 1)

- Responsible for coordinating all aspects of parking during the festival to ensure maximum usage of parking space and the safe entrance and exiting of vehicles to the site before, during and after the event
- Ensures that there is sufficient access to all areas of the ground for emergency vehicles during the festival
- Host club to ensure there are sufficient parking facility for the festival

3.7 Referee Co-Ordinator (Number of posts: 1)

- Responsible for liaising with all referees on the day, ensuring they know the pitches and matches to which they are assigned
- Responsible for sourcing appropriately qualified personnel to act as referees
- Dealing with any queries that referees may have in relation to Mini Rugby laws

3.8 Club Welfare Officer (Number of posts: 1)

It is essential that the Club Welfare Officer is present throughout the day to deal with any issues relating directly to Child Welfare as guided by the IRFU Child Welfare Document

All of the above post holders should be clearly identifiable throughout the festival.

4. On the day information

On the day of the festival it is recommended that the following should take place:

4.1 Pre-festival briefing

This should be chaired by the Festival Organiser with the following people in attendance: -

- A coach from each of the participating teams - this person will in turn brief all of his/her own coaches.
- Volunteers from the host club who have a designated role on the day.

The purpose of this meeting is to clarify any queries that participant clubs may have, as well as make any changes to the previously sent out pre-festival information. It is also suggested that the following areas also be covered: -

- Running order for the day
- Festival structure
- Rules of the Festival (it is essential that for the purpose of consistency that Festival rules adhere to those outlined by the IRFU Mini Rugby Committee.)
- Location of pitches
- Key personnel from the host club and their location
- First aid provision and its location
- Provision of food
- Reminder of the Code of Conduct for players, coaches, spectators etc.
- What happens in the event of bad weather
- What happens if there is a serious incident

In addition, a separate briefing should be carried out with the referees and volunteers from the host club.

4.2 During the Festival

It is also recommended that during the festival, consideration should be given to the rotation of referees to allow them sufficient rest between games. Ideally there should be 3 referees for every 2 pitches to allow for a 2 on: 1 off rotation.

Club coaches should also be reminded that they are responsible for the behaviour of their players between games. It is recommended that organisers allocate teams dedicated areas and that teams base themselves in these areas when not playing.

4.3 Post Festival

It is recommended that during the day's play each participating player receives the following:-

A food voucher entitling them to some form of hot food, fruit pack and water (If no food is provided teams/participants should be informed so that they can make their own arrangements).

It is important to ensure that all players are equally rewarded for their efforts throughout the day.

5. Provision of Medical Cover

Festival organisers should ensure that there is appropriate medical cover throughout the duration of the event.

It is recommended that any medical cover is fully qualified, work within their own scope of practice and are provided through a reputable company. Consideration should be given to the size and scope of the event, the potential injuries and other situations that may arise, the level, qualification and number of medical personnel required. These should take the form of fixed and roving medical cover, particularly if multiple pitches are in use simultaneously.

If ambulances are provided, a risk assessment should be undertaken if the ambulance is required to leave and transport an injured player to hospital. While the host club should have a dedicated contingency plan in place to cover this eventuality, this risk assessment should be undertaken by relevant match personnel.

Providers of medical services should be clearly identifiable and ideally there should be a dedicated first aid station clearly marked that any individual can attend.

It is essential that a First Aid Co-Ordinator be appointed to liaise with the medical professionals to ensure that they have the support/services that they require. The co-ordinator should also be responsible for informing all of the participating teams regarding what first aid cover is provided in advance of the event.

6. Festival/ Event Timings

Below is a summary of the maximum allowable playing time that each player is permitted to play during a festival.

Maximum time a squad/ team is allowed to play per day/ festival.

Rugby Prime (Leprechaun)	60 min
Stage 1	60 min.
Stage 2	70 min.
Stage 3	70 min.
Stage 4	70 min.

NO INJURY OR EXTRA TIME ALLOWED

The number of games is not the issue, the playing time is the issue. Organisers must give thought to teams who arrive to participate in the festival with smaller squads or who pick up injuries throughout the duration of the festival.

7. Start /Finishing time of festival

This will be the main responsibility of the announcer/ time keeper for the festival. The festival must commence at a time that allows participants to arrive and for organisers to have set up the playing area correctly before teams arrive.

Organisers should give consideration to the duration of the festival and the length of time between games – Maximum 3 to 4 hours.

Players should not be asked to wait a lengthy period between games and organisers need to factor in the maximum permitted playing time of each age group.

It is recommended that the **total elapsed playing time of festivals should not exceed 3 ½ hours** i.e. from the beginning of the first game until the end of the last game.

1. Draw Structure

All festivals will have different numbers of participants. To help you when constructing a draw, we have included sample draws in appendix 11 Please note that whatever structure you adopt should ensure that participants maximise but do not exceed their playing time.

When constructing a draw please take into account the following factors: -

- Number of participants
- Number of teams
- Number of pitches available to use
- Time available
- Length of time between games

2. Playing Enclosure

The following definitions apply to all forms of mini rugby:

- The playing area consists of the field-of-play and the in-goal area
- The field of play is bounded by touchlines and goal lines but does not include them. The touchline is considered to be 'in-touch'. The goal line is considered to be part of the in-goal area.
- The playing enclosure is the playing area surrounding it and is under the control of the referee. This area should remain clear.

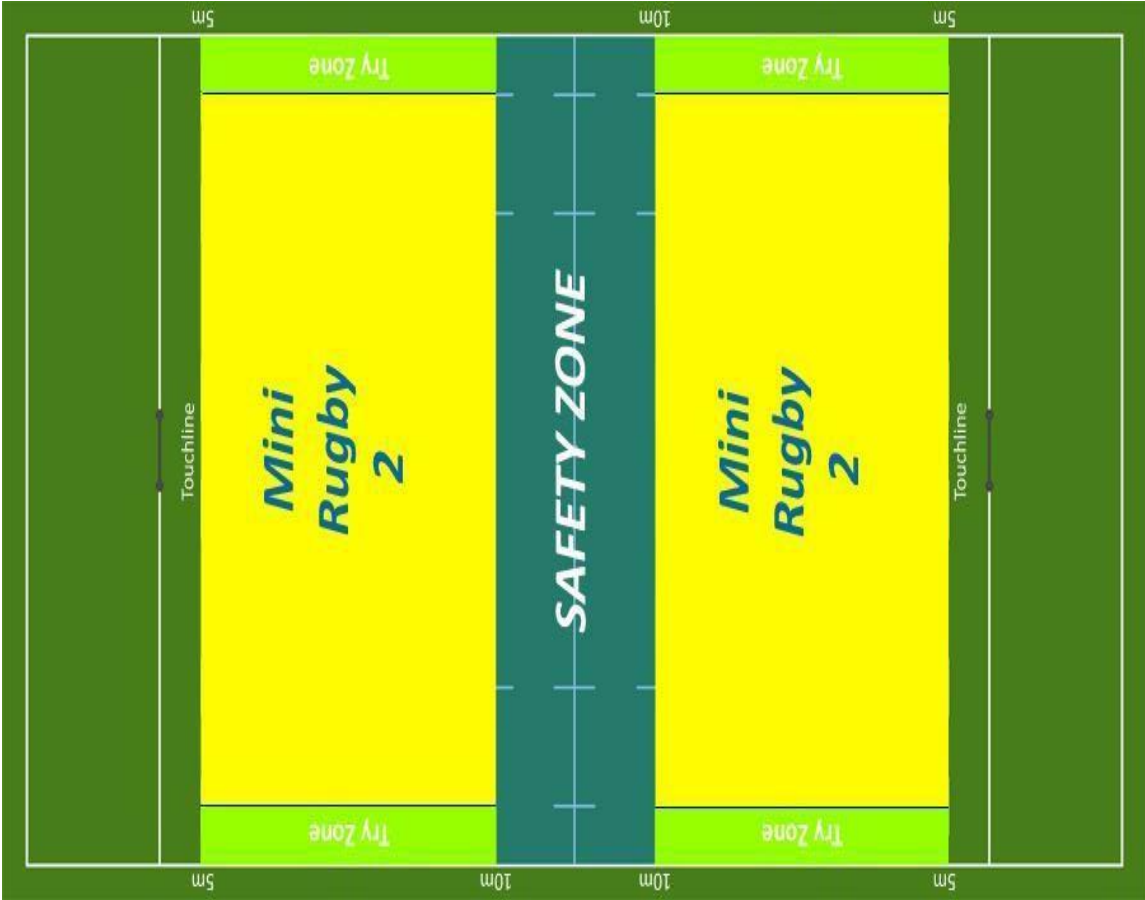
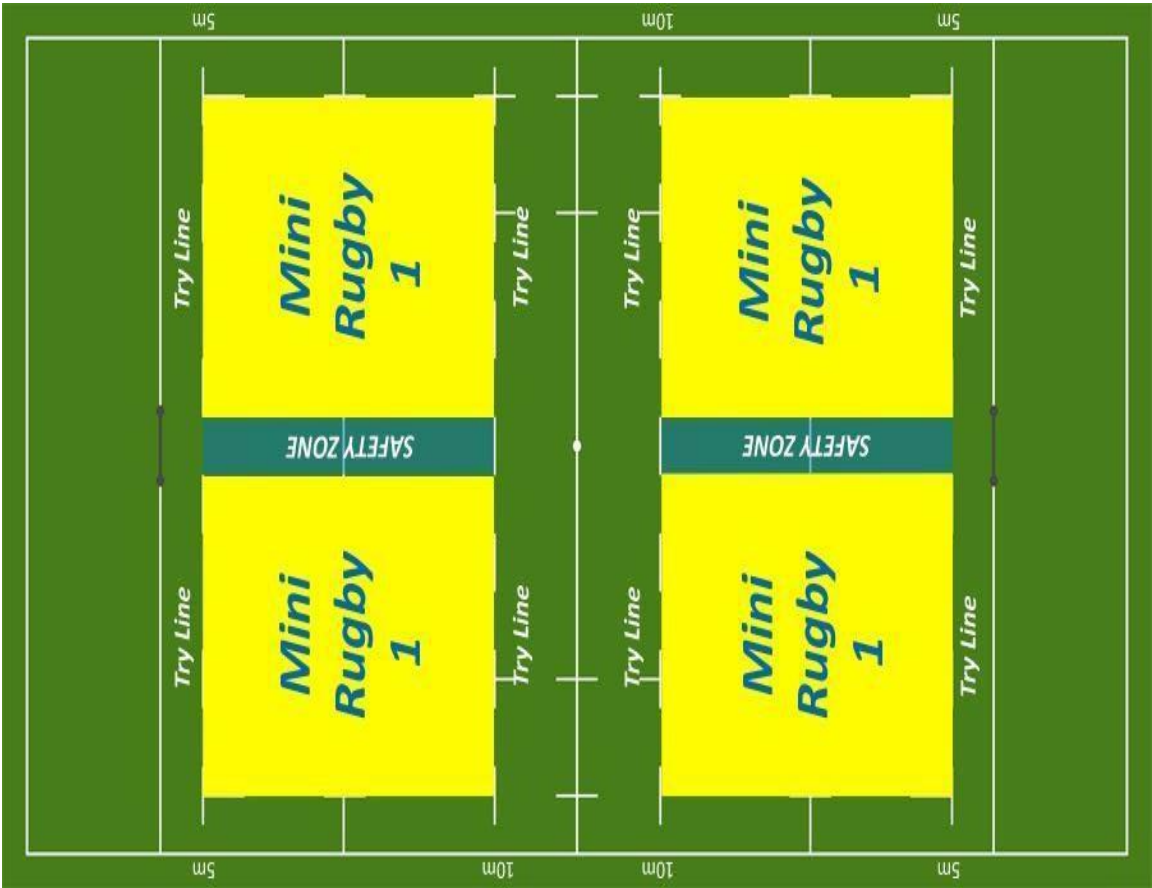
It is recommended that the playing area be 'roped off' in such a way as to restrain or confine spectators to an area a minimum of 5 metres from the touchline and dead ball line. This will stop encroachment by spectators etc. onto the field of play thereby reducing the possibility of injury and making it easier for the referee and touch judges to see the ball/players going into touch.

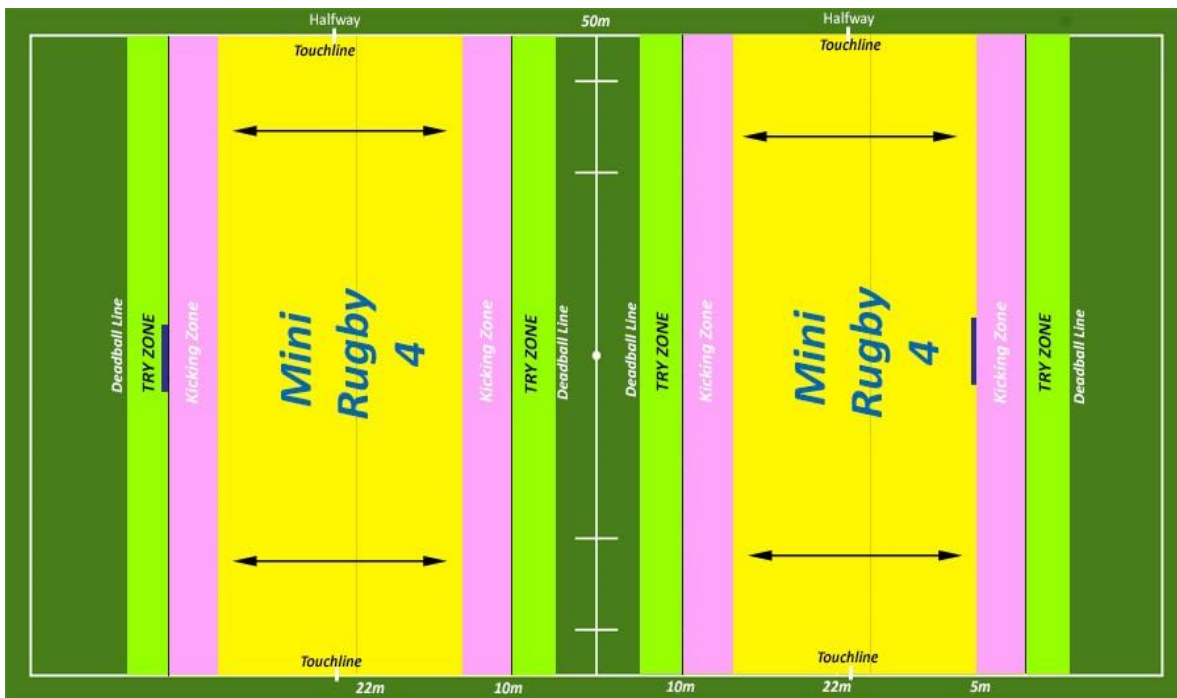
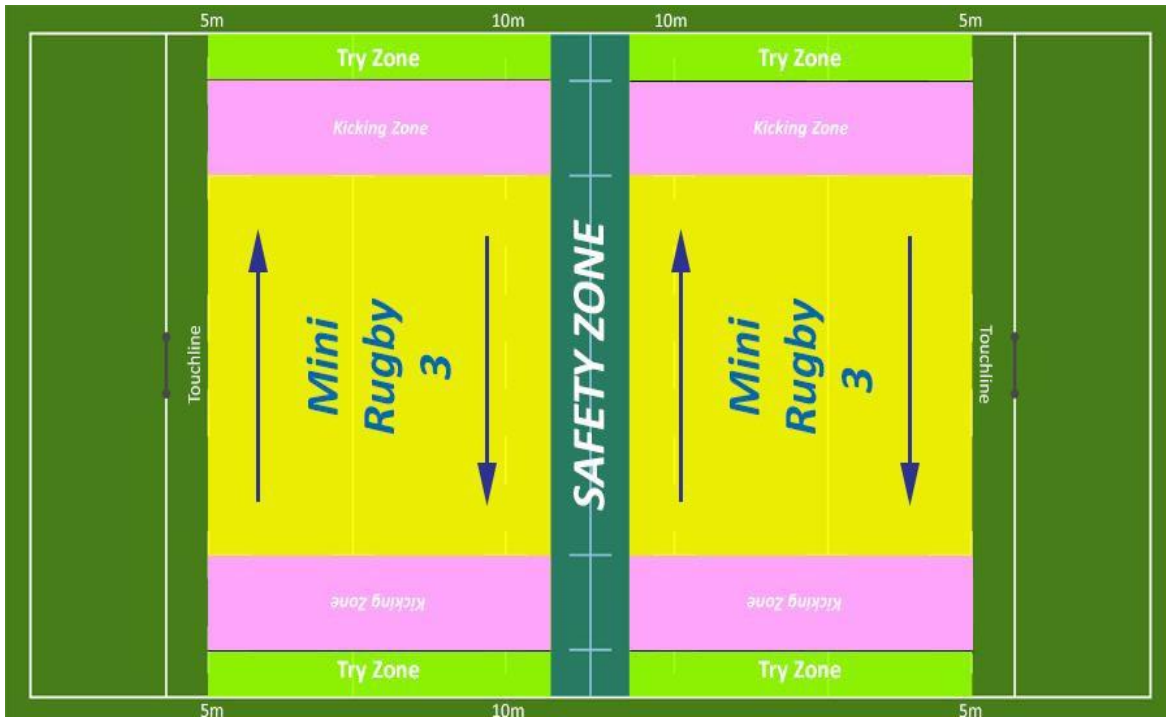
It is further recommended that only the following persons are allowed to enter the playing enclosure:

- The referee, a/one designated coach and players of each team are authorised to enter the field of play. The dedicated coach from each team should be identified to the match official.
- The touch judges and authorised medical staff are permitted between the playing enclosure and the field-of-play.
- The manager, other coaches and reserve players must remain outside the playing enclosure.

The individual pitch co-ordinator will be responsible for monitoring this aspect of the festival at all times.

Pitch Dimensions – IRFU Regulations





3. General Information

Additional Facilities

Host clubs should consider providing temporary additional facilities for the duration of the festival. These could include (although not exclusively) the following:-

- Tuck Shop
- Tea/Coffee etc. for spectators
- Additional toilet facilities

Animals/Dogs at pitch side

Festival organisers should advise all participant clubs that dogs/animals will not be permitted onto any grass area within its club boundary. It is further suggested that the host club also advises its own members that they should not bring dogs onto the club premises.

Use of Photographic / Video equipment

With the increased use of technology (video or photographic) in rugby it is now important for clubs to adopt a policy in relation to the use of these images of their players. The use of these images on websites and publications has raised concerns about the risks posed directly and indirectly to children and young people.

Clubs should consider the following when using images of young players:

- Establish a policy regarding filming and or photographing of players.
- Ensure parental/ guardian agreement for the use of images/ photographs.
- Ensure consent/approval/accreditation is given prior to the festival.
- Establish what type of images/photographs will be allowed to ensure suitability.
- Establish what information will accompany these photographs/ images, ensure players are not identified by name.
- Encourage the use of group photographs, identifying the club rather than the individual

Provision for players in wet weather

The welfare of the players should be the primary concern in this regard. The host club should give consideration to the provision of shelter for all participants in the event of bad weather. This can take many forms including allocation of indoor rooms, or provision of temporary shelters located around the grounds.

If the bad weather appears that it will continue for a considerable time, consideration should be given to temporarily halting the playing programme to allow the bad weather to pass or even abandoning the festival completely.

11. Sample - Team Ireland National Festival Match Programme

Format:

- 5 Teams per pitch (Teams A-E)
- Each match will have 2 x 7-minute halves with 1/2 minutes for half time.
- Rolling substitutions.
- No injury time.
- Match starts /Half time/restart and full time on hooter/ air horn. (Timekeeper not referee)
- No Play offs – each team plays against other teams in their section giving all teams 4 matches and in total 60 minutes of rugby.

Pitch schedule:

Time	Teams/Match	Resting
12.00	Team A v. Team B	
12.20	Team C v. Team D	Team E
12.40	Team A v. Team E	
13.00	Team B v. Team C	Team D
13.20	Team A v. Team D	
13.40	Team B v. Team E	Team C
14.00	Team A v. Team C	
14.20	Team D v. Team E	Team B
14.40	Team B v. Team D	
15.00	Team C v. Team E	Team A

This format ensures players/teams are given sufficient rest periods and stays well within the maximum playing time permitted for each individual.



IRFU AGE GRADE RUGBY

Application to Host a Mini Rugby Festival:

Name of Host Club/ School		
Date of Festival		
Venue		
Duration of Festival	Start Time:	Finishing Time:
Regulations to apply (Stage(s) to apply)		
Festival Coordinator		

List of Participants: (Attach list of all Participants in the event of a Festival)

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Has the Festival the Full Support of the Club/School:	YES	NO
Have all participants been informed of the IRFU Regulations for the Festival:	YES	NO
Have all Participants been informed of the IRFU Child Welfare Policy & Codes:	YES	NO

In making this application _____ (Club/School) confirm that the festival will be conducted in compliance with IRFU Mini Rugby Regulations and Festival Guidelines. All age groups will use the 1st January as the eligibility date.

Signed: _____
(Hon. Sec. Club / School Master in Charge of Rugby)

Date: _____
(Date/ Month/ Year)

To be completed by the Branch:

Comments:

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Decision:

Approved

Not Approved

Signed: _____
Title:

Date: _____
(Day/ Month/ Year)

Application to be submitted to the Branch at least 1MONTH prior to the date of the festival