

**ZONE TAG RUGBY –
AN INCLUSION GAME FOR ALL AGES AND
ABILITIES
BY
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Coaches and teachers often see the ‘quiet’ or ‘less able’ participants standing on the wing and, without directly singling them out, getting them involved can pose a problem. This issue is emphasised further when coaching people with disabilities, where the participants often have widely varying abilities. There are manual and electric wheelchair users, ambulant participants, people with hearing or visual impairments and people with learning difficulties who are physically very able. Zone Tag Rugby is designed to ensure that every player gets more involved in the game, irrespective of ability; the idea of using defined areas (zones) was adopted from Zone Hockey that is now a recognised game by England Hockey, Disability Sport England and the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation. The basic concept of Zone Tag Rugby involves three zones that run lengthways along the pitch; players are paired up according to similar ability and then play as direct opponents within a zone. Laws such as ‘the ball must be passed through all the zones before scoring’ are included to guarantee that all players are participating in the game.

Whilst tag rugby is an ideal way of introducing people to rugby, it still has its limitations and these become particularly noticeable when playing it with a group where their ability levels vary. It is very unlikely, when coaching in schools or in other grassroots programmes, that a group of players will all be at the same level; when working with children from special schools, this is particularly apparent.

The idea evolved after I discussed the Zone Hockey Game with the PE coordinator at one of the local special schools. The school had been instrumental in the development of the adapted hockey game and this experience would prove valuable to the progression of Zone Tag.

It started with a twelve-week block of weekly coaching sessions in Lancasterian School, which is a barrier-free school that has pupils with a wide range of physical disabilities and learning difficulties. After the first few sessions, it was evident that certain players were not involved as much as others and this was not necessarily through lack of trying. It was at this point that different rules and conditions were applied to the game in an attempt to ensure that all players could participate equally during the game. It was decided that the remaining sessions would be used to look at how tag rugby can be adapted to become a fully inclusive game for all participants.

The pupils involved were all from key stage four classes (years 10 and 11). The young people played a vital part in devising and adapting rules, providing first-hand experience and feedback and ideas of what worked well and what needed improving.

The following are the rules that have been developed so far. They are still not 'set in stone' but, through the work done in conjunction with the young people, it was found that these rules allowed the game to fulfil the priority aims, which were:

- Ensuring that the game flowed.
- Simple rules so that the game was easy to understand and play, both for participants and teachers.
- Inclusion – providing an opportunity for all players to participate on a more equal basis.
- Enjoyment for all.

Zone Tag Rugby – The Rules.

General Rules:

- 1- The game is played between two teams of 6 players.
- 2- Pusher (or Zone helpers) enable the participation of athletes in a manual wheelchair, but should not directly influence the game.
- 3- Each team is allowed a maximum of 10 players with a rolling substitutions system.
- 4- The game can be played with a variety of different types of balls, so long as the one chosen is shaped like a rugby ball. It is recommended that an inflated rubber ball is used (it is softer than a standard leather ball and easier to catch than a foam ball).
- 5- When a pass is made to a wheelchair user, it remains in the wheelchair user's possession as long as it hits the wheelchair. It does not have to be caught cleanly.

Playing Rules:

1. Free pass - starting and restarting the game.

- > One of the players in the middle zone starts with a pass to a team-mate in any zone.
- > After a team has scored, the other team restarts with the ball.
- > If the ball goes out at the side, a free pass is taken from the middle zone in line with where the ball left the area of play. The non-offending team (the team who did not touch the ball last) restart.
- > A free pass is awarded to the opposition after a team makes an infringement (i.e. knock-on, forward pass).
- > A free pass can not be taken nearer than 5m from the try line.
- > The defending side must be 5m away from the player taking a free pass or when restarting the game.

2. Scoring a try:

- > A try is scored when the ball is carried over the 'try line' (players have the option of placing the ball on the ground).
- > The ball must have been passed into every zone (since the restart after the last try scored) before a try can be scored.
- > If the ball is intercepted in a team's own half, it must be passed into every zone before the team can score.
- > If the ball is intercepted in the opposition's half, the ball has to be passed to only one zone before the team can score.

3. Making a tag/being tagged:

- > Only the player in possession of the ball can be tagged.
- > Only one tag has to be removed.
- > Once a tag has been made, the tagger must wait until the tagged player has passed the ball and then give the tag back.
- > A pusher, as well as the wheelchair user, wears a belt and tags. If the pusher gets tagged, then the wheelchair user must pass the ball.
- > Players are allowed to move with the ball and they can pass the ball at any point. However, once the defender has tagged them, they must stop moving and look to pass the ball to a team-mate as quickly as possible (time restrictions can be applied where necessary).
- > After the ball has been passed, the tag must be replaced before they can continue to participate in the game.



Picture A – Pushers for manual wheelchair users wear tags as well.

4. Zone play:

- > Players must stay within their designated zones.
- > In the case of a player unavoidably going into another zone (momentum), play shall continue providing they in no way influence the game whilst in the wrong zone.
- > A player can not interfere with play whilst the ball is in another zone (reach across, etc.).

5. Playing area:

The playing area should be adapted according to the players – i.e. number of wheelchair users etc.

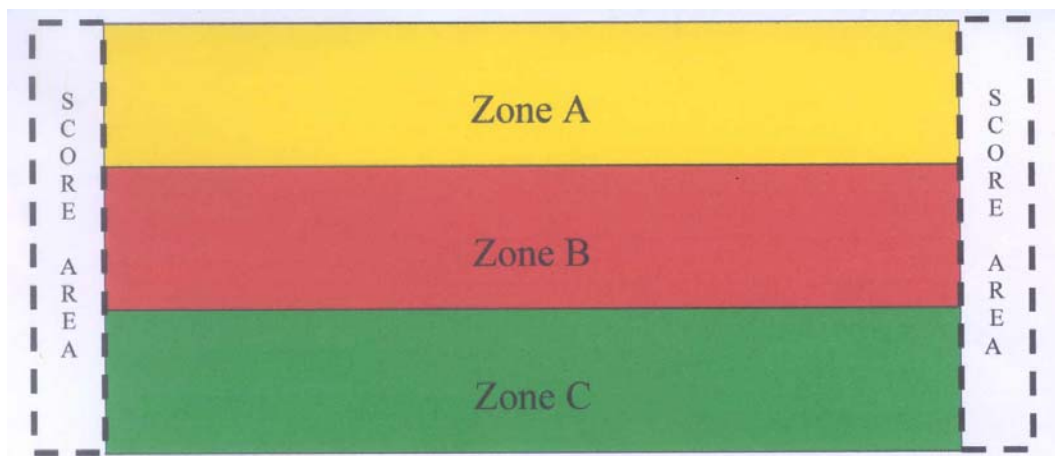
Example set-ups.

Playing area 30m x 40m (each zone 10m in width).

Zone A – 2 x participants assisted with walkers per team (total of 4 players in zone).

Zone B – 2 x participants with learning difficulties per team (total of 4 players in zone).

Zone C – 2 x ambulant participants per team (total of 4 players in zone).

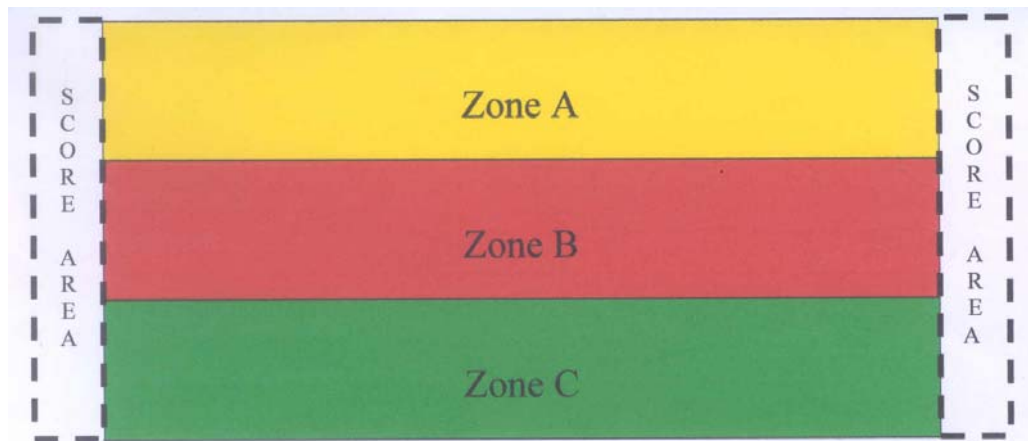


Playing area 30 x 40 (Zone A and C 12 m and zone B approx 6 each in width).

Zone A – 2 x electric wheelchair users on each team (total of 4 players in zone).

Zone B – 2 x participants with learning difficulties per team (total of 4 players in zone).

Zone C – 2 x manual wheelchair users (with or out assistance) (total of 4 players in zone).



Feedback:

During the twelve sessions, different ideas and rules were considered to fit in with the four priority aims that were:

- Ensuring that the game flowed.
- Simple rules so that the game was easy to understand and play, both for participants and teachers.
- Inclusion – providing an opportunity for all players to participate on a more equal basis.
- Enjoyment for all.

There were a number problems and the first was over equipment. Foam balls are often used as a softer option to the standard rugby ball, but the pupils found that the foam balls were actually harder to catch. Soft inflated rubber balls (see picture B and C) were tried and there was a unanimous decision that they were easier to catch and pass.



Picture B



Picture C

There are wide variety of rugby-shaped balls available that can make catching and throwing easier, including balls that are brightly coloured and with bells in to aid the visually impaired (see picture D).



Picture D

Whilst the standard tags and belts are suitable, the pupils found that the belts that have velcro all the way around were easier to use, as it made replacing the tags quicker and easier (see picture E).



Picture E

The main issue with equipment is where to place the tags on the wheelchair users; having the belt around their waist could make it very hard for the opposition to tag. It was soon realised that the tags were best attached to the chairs (where, exactly, would depend on the design of the chair), but this then posed a health and safety risk with participants' hands near the wheels and other working parts of the wheelchair. One solution to this was the use a 'spacer', in this case a section of foam (see picture F and G) that could be attached to the tag belt or wheelchair; the tag is then placed on the end of the foam. This meant that the opposition could make a tag in a safer way.



Picture F



Picture G

Cones placed on the floor as zone markers also caused a problem for some of the wheelchair users; floor markers (see picture H and I) were the simple answer to this.



Picture H



Picture I

Another consideration was the rotation of players between zones. Due to the structure of the game, the players in the middle zone are likely to be more involved than those

in the other two areas. Games were played whereby the players would rotate around the zones, but many of the players found this confusing and so it was decided that players would stay in the same zones throughout the game. As players become more familiar with the game, a rotation system could be introduced.

The players did struggle with passing backwards and the offside rule. However, previous coaching experience suggested that these problems are not unique to this adapted game. Therefore, just as in coaching tag rugby, a progressive approach should be taken, introducing rules and key points one or two at a time. Participants should be reminded and encouraged that they can pass both across and within the zones.



Four examples of pupils trying out different types of equipment and rules.



Conclusion.

Getting all participants active can be a difficult task for any coach, whether it is due to lack of confidence and/or a wide range of ability levels within the group. The objective of Zone Tag Rugby is to address these issues with the aim of getting all players more involved. The sessions that were carried out with the mixed ability

group and young people with varying disabilities and learning difficulties identified that, on the whole, the adapted game achieves these goals and, whilst the rules, laws and set-up of the game may not be the ‘finished article’, it is definitely a work in progress that is having a positive effect on young people that may have lost interest in the game or have never had the opportunity to develop their skills.

Further participation in and feedback on the game are needed to continue the development of the game and it is hoped that more schools and clubs will adopt this idea and participate in Zone Tag Rugby. With more coaching sessions in other Manchester Special Schools, it is hoped that a Zone Tag Rugby festival can become a regular fixture on the PE calendar.

If anyone has any comments or further ideas regarding Zone Tag Rugby and inclusive games, please feel free to contact me, rachelmcbrown@hotmail.com

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