HALF A MILLION HOURS OF RUGBY FOOTBALL

THE INJURIES

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ABSTRACT

In 30 seasons at Rugby School half a million hours of Rugby football have led to 9,885 injuries, an incidence of 197.7 injuries per 10,000 player hours. This incidence is compared with those from other school games, and with those of other series of Rugby football injuries. The injuries are compared regionally with those of other series, and the more important are listed.

Rugby football is the team game played at Rugby School in the Advent term (September to December). Records have been kept of the injuries of the 650 boarders, age range 13-18 years, for the 30 Advent terms 1950 to 1979. In these 30 terms half a million player hours of Rugby football have accumulated; 30 players playing a game for one hour constitute 30 player hours of that game.

The school Rugby football season is concentrated; the first two weeks of term consist largely of training, school matches are played in the next nine weeks, with a week's interruption for a half term exeat, and the last two weeks are devoted to domestic competition. Ten school teams of differing ages and abilities play matches against other schools. The first team play 13 matches, the under 14 B team play 5. Absence from the game, due to injury or illness, jeopardises the chance of obtaining a place in a team. Every injury recorded in this survey has led to at least one week's absence from the game. The injuries are consecutive and unselected.

During these 30 years there have been changes in the structure of the game in the school. Pre-season and early season training are now appropriate, more school matches and fewer domestic games are played; the skilled players play more games, the unskilled fewer.

In these half million player hours of Rugby football 9,885 injuries have been recorded, an incidence of 197.7 injuries per 10,000 player hours. The rates have been consistent (Table I).

TABLE I
RUGBY SCHOOL
RUGBY FOOTBALL
September 1950 – December 1979

Date	Injuries	Player Hours	Rate/10,000 Player Hours
1950-54	1,891	100,000	189.1
1955-59	2,056	100,000	205.6
1960-64	2,011	100,000	201.1
1965-69	1,504	75,000	200.5
1970-74	1,392	70,000	198.9
1975-79	1,031	55,000	187.5
1950-79	9,885	500,000	197.7

The injury rate for Rugby football may be compared with the injury rates for other sporting activities in Rugby School (Table II). Not only is the incidence greatest in Rugby football, but the injuries are more varied and more severe. Cricket and hockey injuries usually affect the face or hands. Athletics injuries are mainly muscular; stress fractures are seen in cross country runners. Basketball injuries are commonly of the fingers, knees and ankles. Association football is played in a light-hearted manner and the injury rate has

Table V compares these rates with those from other surveys. Weightman and Browne (1974) (North of England Clubs) and Davidson (1978) (Newington College, Sydney, NSW) record greater proportions of head and neck injuries; all surveys record a low injury rate for the trunk, and, with the exception of Davidson

(1978), more lower than upper limb injuries; in Australia the grounds are probably harder than in Britain. In Rugby School hard grounds predispose to more cases of concussion and more upper limb fractures. Soft, wet grounds lead to more injuries of the lower limb.

TABLE V
SITE OF INJURY PERCENT

	Weightman and Browne (1974)	Adams (1977)	O'Connell (1954)	Davies and Gibson (1978)	Davidson (1978)	Allemandou (1971)	Sparks
Head & Neck	30.6	16.1	23.8	24.5	37.9	18.3	16.9
Upper Limb	22.1	32.3	31.2	22.5	28.3	28.4	25.9
Trunk	11.6	11.2	11.2	10.6	6.5	13.4	11.1
Lower Limb	35.7	40.4	33.8	42.4	27.3	39.9	46.1
Number of cases	1,944	1,000	600	151	757	10,510	9,885

Weightman and Browne's (1974) series cover the 1970/71 season. Adams' (1977) figures are for the seasons 1973/76, and for teams in the Leeds area. O'Connell's (1954) injuries come from Irish clubs and schools, 1930/1950. Davies and Gibson's (1978) are from ten first-class English and Welsh clubs in the 1976/77 season. Davidson's (1978) figures cover the injuries of Newington College, Sydney, teams and their opponents, 1969/78. Allemandou's (1971) figures are obtained from insurance claims from French players at club and school levels for the season 1968/69. The Rugby School figures cover the 30 seasons 1950/79. The more important injuries are listed in Table VI.

All team games carry a quantifiable risk of injury. Rugby football is a game of physical contact, much of it violent. The injury rate for Rugby football is the highest of all games at this school. Even so, the more than 4,500 boarders who have passed through the school in the past 30 years have each sustained, on average, only two football injuries, and few have been serious. The school, and sportsmen the world over, have reason to be grateful to William Webb Ellis who, in 1823, "with a fine disregard for the rules of football as played in his time, first took the ball in his arms and ran with it, thus originating the distinctive feature of the Rugby game."

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