

**“7 Ways to Bring Rugby  
Match Fitness into Your  
Team without Tiresome  
and Just Downright  
Useless Laps of a  
Pitch”**

**A Special Report from**

**[www.rugbyfitnesscoach.com](http://www.rugbyfitnesscoach.com)**

**by John Lark M.A. CSCS**

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Inside you will find the best 7 ways to get Match Fit for Rugby without wasting time and effort and having fun!

## Introduction

I have been there, seen that and come to the same questions that any other coach and player do:

“What purpose do laps of the pitch serve?”

“How can I mask the fitness element to create enjoyable sessions for my players?”

“How can we incorporate match fitness into non-contact situations?”

All of these are crucial questions that each coach and player needs to be able to answer. Hopefully they will be answered with the introduction of a few of these ‘game-based fitness’ drills.

Each session lasts around 40 minutes making it a perfect ‘end-of-session’ drill.

Ideally you want to perform your skills and specific conditioning at the start of the session. Common sense and neurological reasons dictate that you will be much fresher and skill acquisition will be much higher than if you were to run the bollocks out of the lads before attempting to teach passing drills off the wrong hand.

## 1. Tip Rugby

There is nothing like a bit of tip rugby to zip up the energy levels and improve rugby fitness. The problem that I seen with the way it is played at most clubs is that there is too much room to hide.

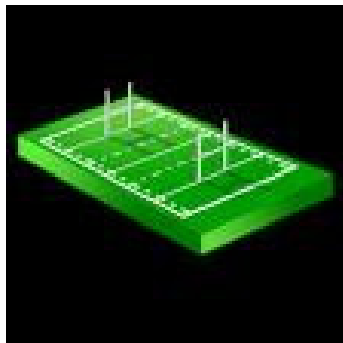
15-a-side free for alls really serve no purpose.

However, 5 a-side working across the pitch work on all facets of skill development, support lines, defence and fitness.

It is tough.

The basic rules are as follows:

Divide your teams into forwards and backs, or any positional requirements. 5-7 a-side is perfect. Allow for two pitches running across the pitch – normally 4 teams. A tournament can be held over the session.



Tackle is ANY form of contact with the being played from the exact point of tackle. The tendency is for most forwards to steal the extra yard or two following a tip. This leads to a messy game. Penalise this early on if people can't get the hang of it. They quickly learn.

Players once tackle roll the ball through the legs with the defending team back 10.

There are an unlimited number of tackles.

If the ball leads the field of play bring it in 5m from the sideline – opposition ball.

### **1. 'Soft Tackle'**

This is ideal the Thursday before a match. You want an element of contact but do not want to risk injury.

The rules are as above except the tackle consists of a full shoulder and hold for 2 seconds. This is crucial. Players must be positioning themselves to make a tackle. It moulds good habits yet falls short of full contact.

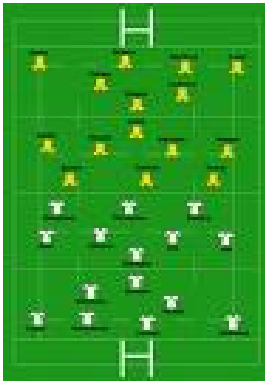
The following variations can be incorporated:

- a) Both teams must commit two players to the tackle following the tackled person hitting the floor. This simulates a tackle situation and will free up space to exploit out-side.
- b) Both teams commit defensive positioning around the tackle to simulate positions at ruck time.

## 2. 'Forfit' Tip

Pre-season or periods in the season where there is a long-lay-off allows this to be used effectively.

Teams can be a little bit larger – maybe 10-12 a side played on the full pitch if numbers are low.



Following a tackle, both the tackler and the tackled person perform an exercise designed to replicate the demands that they will have imposed on them at tackle time.

The tackle is made as above in soft tackle. Following this, the tackler performs 5 up-downs (An up down) is performed by falling to the floor and then getting back to the feet without the use of the arms).

The tackled person presents the ball allows play to move and then performs a series of press-ups and sit-ups.

One side defends for a set period of time – usually 2 minutes before moving to the attack.

Scoring is based on rounds. Whoever scores the most tries in round 1 wins and so on. 10 rounds should take around 40 minutes.

### **3. Deadline – tip and return to posts**

In this game the same rules apply as above. However, following a tackle both defender and attacker sprint to their own goal posts before returning to the game.

### **4. GAA**

In Ireland, we have an insanely action-packed game called GAA. There are no off-sides and team sizes are around 12-15 in number.



It is played on a full-size pitch and you will need a set of posts.

Scoring is as follows – kicking or throwing over the posts =1 point. Kicking under the posts or under the posts = 3 points.

General rules (after a while they tend to go out the window!) are that you cannot run more than 5 paces without passing or kicking the ball – that includes to yourself.

Shoulder contact is allowed!

This is also great if you have more than one pitch. However, make sure that no players start hiding! As always if this starts to happen. Shrink the team sizes and have two pitches running alongside one another.

### **5. Back and Forward**

Set up two zones at each end of the pitch measuring 10m by 10m. The aim of the game is to score a point by getting the ball into the opposition end zone.

The game commences by a backward pass. From then all passes can be made in any direction.

The attacking team, however, can't run with the ball. They pass and follow, using space as and where.

This is a superb game for fitness and utilising and viewing space. It also emphasises support as the attacking team can not run with the ball.

As a coach emphasise the pass and follow element to the game.

### **6. Match Fit**

This game really is as good or as close as it gets to match intensity fitness.

Full 15-a-side rugby is played on a smaller pitch. Ideally between the two 22s.

In this version the game is played for a total of 40 minutes and is non-stop. Basically you are condensing a match into 40 minutes (studies have shown that the ball is actually in play for around 30 minutes out of the 80)

As a coach you give the ball to the attacking side for 2 minutes. Then immediately swap to the opposition who then attack for 2 minutes. Interestingly the non-stop element of the game will allow you to monitor strengths and weaknesses of your team more effectively.

If both teams find it easy to score and you are leaking tries then defence is an issue that needs to be addressed. Equally if both sides can't score to save their lives then attacking is an issue. Obviously 2 minutes is a short time to score. However, how much territory each side makes within their 2 minute window is a good indicator.

The key here is to have a supply of balls on-hand. Attack knock on – throw a ball to them immediately. Ball goes out of play – throw a ball in immediately.

Do not allow for stoppages in play. That also means no set-pieces.

If a defender infringes then the penalty is to run through their own posts before being awarded back into play. Play continues without them.

## Summary

All of these games are designed to be played at or even above match intensity. Therefore save your chat and long-winded coaching observations to either before or after the drill. Not during. This is all about witnessing, as a coach, how your players are taking on-board your ideas and using them in a match scenario. After-all, that is how you play – isn't it?

For this and hundreds more rugby fitness ideas, exercises, drills and a fool proof system click [here](#)

## About the Author



John Lark is a former youth level international rugby player having represented England U19s. He has played at professional level in the UK and Ireland and is the author of 'Get Fit for Rugby'. He has helped hundreds of rugby players all over the world with his training book and manual geared to the coach and player.