



**Old Albanian
Rugby Football Club**

www.oajrfc.com

September 2008

Dear Parent,

Handbook and Policies for Under 7 Age Group Mini Rugby

First of all, congratulations on choosing to bring your child to play rugby at Old Albanians. The club is always delighted to receive new players, especially ones with long playing futures ahead.

Before your child takes part, it is important that you become aware of some of the policies applying to this age group at this club. These are outlined in a Handbook which may be given to you or which you may download from the website. Please note that the policies specifically relate to the Under 7 age group.

Some elements of these policies are derived from those of the Rugby Football Union (RFU) and others are local to this club. All policies are based on attempts to allow our children to enjoy their rugby in a safe environment in which they can be cared for and learn. As a consequence, parents are asked to assist us work to these policies at all times.

Many thanks for your cooperation. Have a good season.

Yours sincerely,

Derek Foster
Head Coach, Under 7 Mini Rugby - Season 2008-2009.
Peter Bambrough
Head Coach, Under 6 Mini Rugby – Season 2008-2009



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Handbook and Policies

for

Under 7 Age Group

Mini Rugby

Season 2008 - 2009

1. Eligibility of Children to Play

- 1.1. The Under 7 age group is the first age group recognised by the RFU and refers to children who are **under 7 years of age on 1st September 2008**, but are 5 years or older on the same date.
- 1.2. The Under 7 age group is **open equally to girls and boys**.
- 1.3. Children younger than the Under 7 age group do not “officially” play rugby. There are no recognised Under 6 teams, matches, tournaments or festivals and many other clubs will not accept playing under 6’s as a consequence and for insurance reasons.
- 1.4. However, the OA club (and to a limited extent the RFU) recognise the need to encourage and wherever possible include younger children when they are interested in rugby, physically able and where they **CAN PARTICIPATE IN A SAFE, CARING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**. Therefore, we are willing for 5 & 6 year olds joining in if possible, subject to the policies 1.5, 1.6 and 2 below.
- 1.5. Children who are officially **Under 6 (under 6 years of age on 1st September 2008) will train in separate groups from those who are Under 7** except in the following circumstances:
 - 1.5.1. When specifically identified by the Head or Assistant Coach as a child with sufficient physical and emotional maturity, as well as fitness and ability, to train amongst the Under 7’s.
 - 1.5.2. In these circumstances, the Head or Assistant Coach will explain to the parents / guardians their opinion and invite those parents / guardians to grant permission for their child to train with the older children at their own risk. If parents do not agree, the child must remain within their peer group of Under 6’s.
 - 1.5.3. No child will be given this invitation to train with the Under 7’s until they have attained their 6th birthday.
 - 1.5.4. Children who are Under 6, but who train and play with the Under 7’s, will be required to remain as Under 7’s again the following season and cannot progress up the age groups in advance of their age.
 - 1.5.5. This policy is broadly in line with that recommended by the RFU as follows:
“6 Year Old Player Dispensation: To encourage recruitment children may enter the Under 7 age grade immediately they attain their 6th birthday. Players aged 6 may not, however, take advantage of this dispensation if it will result in their training/playing with Under 9s playing in an Under 8 team under the dispensation referred to in Section 3.17(a). The introduction of players under the age of 6 into Mini-Midi Rugby squads may invalidate the compulsory insurance cover provided by the RFU for players in those squads and for their coaches/match officials.”
http://www.rfu.com/pdfs/referees/200506/continuum/THE_RUGBY_CONTINUUM_200506_PART3.pdf
Paragraph 3.15(d).
- 1.6. **Children who only become 5 years old during the season (i.e. on or after 1st September 2008) will not be eligible to join.**

2. Ratio of Adults to Children

- 2.1. The ability of the coaches to accept children participating in training sessions depends on the number of adults available to help out in the coaching sessions.
- 2.2. The target ratio of adults / children equals 1 adult / number of children equal to the age of the children. In other words, **we will strive for one adult coach to safely care for seven Under 7 children and one adult coach to safely care for six Under 6 children**.
- 2.3. If insufficient adults volunteer as coaches, we will be forced to limit the players in each age group on a first come first served basis by registration.

3. Registration of Players

- 3.1. **Players are required to register with the club on the form provided by the Membership Secretary.**

- 3.2. Registration exists to provide the club with important contact information for each player, to allow parents / guardians to indicate the existence of any health problems their child suffers from and to serve as a record of payment of the registration fee.
- 3.3. Players are insured via the club ONLY when fully registered.
- 3.4. Registered players are also registered with the RFU and are then eligible to play in matches, tournaments and festivals. **Players cannot play in such events without registration with the RFU.**
- 3.5. **The registration fee for the season 2008-2009 is £80.** The fee for a sibling of a registered player, however, is only £50. There are no additional fees planned. The income to the club from registration fees is vital to underwrite the running costs of the Minis & Junior sections of the club. There is a reduced rate for a player joining in the second half of the season.
- 3.6. The registration fee allows players and parents to enjoy the facilities of the OA's clubhouse. Parents can become social members of OAs for no charge and this entitles them to a 10% discount on food and drink purchased with the club card.
- 3.7. The club recognises that very young children in the Under 7's, who are new to the game of rugby, may not wish to continue to play, or may be irregular in their wish to attend sessions. It is reasonable for parents / guardians to be uncertain as to whether they wish to register the child and pay the fee in these circumstances. **The club requires that all children are promptly registered, but may allow the payment of the fee to be deferred until the child has attended no more than 5 sessions on enquiry to the Head Coach. Once 5 sessions have been attended, the registration fee is due.**

4. Player Attendance

- 4.1. The first session will take place on 7th September 2008 and thereafter on a weekly basis most Sundays, except during holidays or certain dates. The full up to date programme of "fixtures" appears on the website and parents / guardians are required to check the website (www.oajrfc.com) on a regular basis as changes to the programme do occur throughout the season.
- 4.2. **It is not compulsory for players to attend every session.** However, the more regularly a player attends, the more they will benefit from participating and the more they will enjoy their rugby. Therefore, parents / guardians are requested to attempt to bring their children as frequently as possible.
- 4.3. However, mini rugby is for children and not adults. **Parents / guardians of children who are not enjoying their rugby and who are not eager to attend should consider whether they should bring the child to the session.** Unwilling children do not learn and do not develop a love for the game - they should not be forced to attend.
- 4.4. Players are requested to attend normal training sessions for a 10.00 am start each Sunday. Normal sessions end on or before 11.30. Exceptions to this, particularly on those weeks with matches, tournaments or festivals, will be announced during training sessions in the preceding weeks. Sessions will finish early or may be cancelled due to bad weather.
- 4.5. **At the start of each session, parents / guardians are requested to bring the child to the administrator on duty to allow the child's presence to be registered prior to the child taking part in the session.** This is vital for the coaches to know which children are present, how old they are and what their level of development is. Proper records of attendance help ensure that the players get most out of their rugby.

5. Attendance of Responsible Adults

- 5.1. **Every player who attends a session must have a responsible adult ON SITE at all times.**
- 5.2. Neither the coaches nor the club are able to provide a child care service. Parents / guardians are reminded that the duty to care for their child rests with them and not the club. If unable to attend themselves, it is their responsibility to arrange for the presence of another responsible adult
- 5.3. **During the enrolment at the start of each session, the name and whereabouts of the responsible adult, as well as the relationship to the child, must be recorded by the administrator on duty.**

- 5.4. The responsible adults in attendance are free to use the clubhouse during the session, or perhaps to watch other sessions of other age groups. However, they should also consider supporting the efforts of their children by volunteering to help (see below) or by providing support from the sidelines.
- 5.5. ***Children may only be collected at the end of the session by a responsible adult indicated to the administrator at the time of enrolment at the start of the session.***

6. Adult Volunteers

- 6.1. ***All coaches in this age group in this club are volunteers.*** There is no team of existing coaches for this age group other than those few adult volunteers who have an association with this age group because their child played as an Under 6 last season.
- 6.2. ***The success of the sessions and of this age group as a whole depends entirely on the willingness of adult volunteers.*** The size of the group and the age of the players able to take part are entirely dependent on the availability of sufficient adult volunteers. (see paragraphs 2 above)
- 6.3. ***All parents / guardians are requested to consider lending a hand in some way.*** This is the best way of ensuring that your children can take part. ***Volunteers need not feel committed to attend all sessions through every week of the season*** – few of us are able to commit to such a schedule. Volunteers need not worry about their own level of coaching skills or knowledge of the game - much of this age group is about having fun, getting exercise and learning to play together in a team sport. Several good “play-leaders” are all we really need and those adults with more knowledge as “coaches” will assist the others where necessary. Adults may also assist with this age group in other ways as alternatives to coaching. For example, by assisting with the distribution and collection of kit during each session; by ensuring that all children are adequately dressed when playing or resting; by watching over groups of players resting from activities; by ensuring that injured children are cared for until their responsible adult takes over; etc. All adults in attendance are requested to offer assistance to the group whenever possible.
- 6.4. Any adult wishing to pursue some training as a coach or referee for mini rugby will be considered for support by the club.
- 6.5. All adults taking an active part in a defined role, such as a coach, will be required to undergo CRB clearance as part of child protection measures.

7. Health and Safety of Players and Adults

- 7.1. ***Rugby is a physical sport. It is always possible that players may become injured as a consequence of participating in rugby.***
- 7.2. However, ***mini rugby at the Under 6 and Under 7 age groups is purposefully non-contact.*** Coaches will conduct sessions in as safe a way as possible and will coach to the rules of the game for this age group to encourage safety. ***Dangerous play will not be tolerated during practice or matches.***
- 7.3. ***Occasional minor injuries do occur*** such as minor bumps, grazes, bruises and twisted ankles, etc. Some of these arise accidentally as a consequence of the relatively immature physical abilities and exuberance of children at this age that lead to falls and collisions, for example. Thankfully, ***serious injuries at this age group are highly unlikely.*** When children of this age group “take a knock”, they are often upset and in need of the care and attention of a familiar adult. This is ***a very important reason for a responsible adult to be on site for each player.***
- 7.4. ***Parents / guardians are encouraged to consider the use of protective clothing or devices*** such as mouth-guards and shin-guards. Although not essential at this age, parents / guardians should decide whether they wish to use them or not at their own discretion.
- 7.5. The rugby season extends over the winter. The weather during this time can be both very cold and very wet. Sessions are likely to continue through most weather. ***Therefore it is essential that players arrive at each session appropriately equipped to play through the weather.*** Parents / guardians should consider the following as essential elements of clothing from a safety perspective – rugby or football boots (with detachable screw-in metal studs that must not be sharp), tracksuit or equivalent for warmth, waterproofs, hat, sports gloves (such as “stick-mitts”). Players should not wear clothes, tops or trousers, with zips that may present a hazard to their fellow players. Suitable examples of most of these can be purchased from the club shop, which is open during sessions in the clubhouse each week of the season. In addition, the club strip (shirt, shorts, socks, etc) can also be purchased from the club shop.

- 7.6. Adults in attendance at sessions should consider their own safety from the elements and be appropriately dressed.
- 7.7. ***It is advisable to have sufficient drinks and snacks available for yourself and your children during each session.*** This is very important on warm days at the start and end of the season, but is equally important on the colder days, when a warm drink might be useful.
- 7.8. ***If any child has an injury or current illness they should not play or train*** and if they do, they do so entirely at the risk of their parents / guardians. Activity whilst injured or ill might be feasible when young, but can lead to serious debility when older.
- 7.9. ***If any child has a health problem, the parents / guardians must make this known to the Head Coach during registration and discuss the suitability of participating in rugby.*** Children with such problems who do participate do so at the risk of their parents / guardians.
- 7.10. Neither spectacles nor sports goggles may be worn during training or in matches.

8. Player Development

- 8.1. ***The object of the game in this age group is fun, exercise, development of skills and introduction to the game of rugby.***
- 8.2. Coaches will recognise the importance of fun and enjoyment when coaching players and ***most learning will be achieved through activity and practice*** rather than instruction.
- 8.3. The Club aims to provide rugby sessions which are matched to the players' ages and abilities, as well as their physical and behavioural development. To achieve this, ***it is necessary to recognise that, at this age group more than any other, there are wide variations in abilities, attitudes, skills and interest.***
- 8.4. The Club will attempt to run ***an "inclusive" method of coaching*** where all players within each age grouping (as outlined in paragraphs 1 and 2 above) will be given opportunities to participate in all aspects of all sessions.
- 8.5. However, to ensure that all players are coached in a safe and stimulating environment, ***children may be grouped with other children of similar capabilities for some sessions*** in order to create groups of an appropriate level of endeavour for those children if possible. ***The membership of such groups will be decided by the coaches but will not be fixed for the season*** - players will be observed regularly and moved between groups as appropriate to their development as players. It is hoped that, as a result, all children will have the potential to progress at their own rate. When players are grouped in this way, the ***groups will specifically not be named by any method that implies that any groups are better or worse than others*** to avoid any negative effects on the young players.
- 8.6. Where a child is showing no interest in the sessions, no aptitude for the game or either physical or emotional immaturity, the parents / guardians should consider whether it is appropriate for the child to continue to attend and a break from the game may be advisable.

9. Selection for Matches, Tournaments and Festivals

- 9.1. The fixture programme includes days where OA's will be involved in matches, triangular fixtures and festivals of rugby against teams from other clubs.
- 9.2. ***Wherever eligible and available, all players will have an opportunity to participate in some such event with the consent of their parents / guardians.***
- 9.3. ***All players who are officially in the Under 7 age group are eligible to take part.***
- 9.4. Some players who are officially in the Under 6 age group may take part if the following 3 criteria are met:
- 9.4.1. The player is specifically identified by the Head or Assistant Coach as a child with sufficient physical and emotional maturity, as well as fitness and ability, to play a match amongst the Under 7's.
- 9.4.2. The parents / guardians consent to the player joining the Under 7's for the match.

- 9.4.3. The Club has informed the coaches and match officials of opposing teams that a “6 year old dispensation” is being applied, each player concerned is identified and the other coaches and officials are in agreement.
- 9.5. **Players may not participate in such events before their 6th birthday.**
- 9.6. **OA’s will aim to field as many teams as possible on each occasion from available and eligible players to attempt to allow all such players a chance to play.** Whenever possible, a squad system will be employed to avoid the overplaying of the “best players” and to provide everybody a satisfactory amount of playing time.
- 9.7. Before each fixture (other than festivals – see below), **an understanding will be sought with the opposing clubs as to whether they are selecting teams by ability or playing an inclusive method of selection.** This is important because many clubs *do* routinely select teams by ability and serious mismatches can occur if OA’s were to field an inclusive “mixed ability” team – in such cases player safety can be compromised and heavy defeats can be very demoralising for the players. **An attempt will be made to encourage opposing clubs to field teams in a way that will provide an opportunity for all our players to take part where eligible and available.**
- 9.8. If selection by ability is necessary for matches and triangular fixtures, it will be done by the coaches with subtlety and sensitivity to attempt to shield players from feelings of teams being “better” or “worse” than others. **Parents and guardians are asked to support the coaches in this and to understand the reasons for selection by this method.** Attempts will be made to match selected teams against selected equivalent teams from the other clubs.
- 9.9. Festivals of rugby differ from the above fixtures in that they are competitive events and are governed by rules of player eligibility, squad size, number of teams that can be entered, etc. It is usual for more than one competition to take place in each age group at festivals (e.g. tournaments with a cup, bowl and plate as prizes) to give each team a prize to compete for. Most other clubs select teams by ability for these festivals and it is only fair to the players at OA’s that we employ such a policy to give our teams a chance of experiencing success. **These festivals are the only circumstance where, in this age group, selection by ability will be employed by choice.** At the time of writing, there are only three festivals in the fixture list.
- 9.10. **Parents and guardians are asked to provide special support for the volunteer coaches on days where there are fixtures involving other clubs.** These days are often very busy and not as relaxed as normal training sessions. This support can be provided by:
- 9.10.1. Making the coaches fully aware of the availability of their child such that they might be included in the fixture.
 - 9.10.2. Making the coaches aware of any changes in the availability of the child so that shortfalls in squad sizes might be foreseen and other players given the chance to take part.
 - 9.10.3. Providing support for the coaches when selection has excluded, for whatever reason, some children – the coaches themselves will be uncomfortable with this and do not need further aggravation from other adults over such selection.
 - 9.10.4. Provide support and assistance to all teams from OA’s Under 7’s group, whether your child is involved in that team or not.
 - 9.10.5. Ensure that you understand the arrangements for the day to avoid mix-ups and disappointing young players.

10. Rules of Mini Rugby

- 10.1. **The rules of mini rugby are referred to as the “Continuum”** and are published on the website of the RFU. (http://www.rfu.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/RFUHome.Refereeing_Detail/StoryID/10884).
- 10.2. Specific aspects of the Continuum for the Under 7 age group are contained at http://www.rfu.com/pdfs/referees/200506/continuum/THE_RUGBY_CONTINUUM_200506_PART3.pdf.
- 10.3. **The club will coach players to play the game according to the rules as set out in the Continuum.** As the name suggests, these rules are adapted from the laws of the full adult game and continually change as the children grow and progress until they reach the full adult level game.
- 10.4. **Parents / guardians are asked to obtain a copy of the Continuum and make themselves familiar with the relatively simple rules of the game** for this age group so that they can assist their children understand the game.

- 10.5. Specific guidance for Under 6's is contained within a document produced by the RFU and available from the website
http://www.rfu.com/pdfs/referees/200506/continuum/THE_RUGBY_CONTINUUM_200506_PART6.pdf).

11. Conduct of Players

- 11.1. **Parents and guardians are asked to assist the coaches teach children how to conduct themselves well as players** in addition to simply playing well. More information on these aspects of the game is available from the RFU website at:
http://www.rfu.com/pdfs/referees/200506/continuum/THE_RUGBY_CONTINUUM_200506_PART3.pdf.
- 11.2. The following is based on the Good Player's Code from the RFU's Continuum:

The Club encourages all players to:

- (a) Recognise and appreciate the efforts made by coaches, parents, match officials and administrators in providing them the opportunity to play and enjoy the game of rugby.
- (b) Show loyalty and commitment to the adults and their team mates.
- (c) Help every player to enjoy rugby safely and free from all types of bullying or abuse.
- (d) Understand that if a player or group of players feel they are not being treated in a manner that is acceptable, then they should tell an adult either at the Club or outside of the game.
- (e) Play because they want to do so, not to please their coaches or parents.
- (f) Remember that learning new skills, having fun and enjoyment are the most important parts of the game.
- (g) Pay attention and try to do their best at all training and coaching sessions.
- (h) Work hard for themselves *and* their team - both will then benefit.
- (i) Praise good play by all players on their team and by their opponents.
- (j) Be a good sportsman - win with dignity, lose with grace.
- (k) Play to the rules of the Game and accept, without question, all referees' decisions even if they appear to make a mistake.
- (l) Control their emotions. Verbal or physical abuse of team mates, opponents, coaches, match officials or spectators is not acceptable.
- (m) Treat all players, as they would like to be treated themselves. Do not interfere with, bully or take advantage of any player.

12. Conduct of Adults in Attendance

- 12.1. **It is very important for all adults in attendance at sessions to show a good example to the players**, whether related to them or not.
- 12.2. Further information on general policies in this area can be found on the club's website at:
<http://www.oaifc.com/policies.htm>
- 12.3. In addition, further specific guidance can be found on the RFU's website at:
http://www.rfu.com/pdfs/referees/200506/continuum/THE_RUGBY_CONTINUUM_200506_PART2.pdf
- 12.4. The following is based on the RFU's Good Parent's and Good Spectator's Codes.

Parents / Guardians are asked to:

- (a) Become familiar with the training sessions so that they can ensure their child is fully involved.
- (b) Become familiar with the coaching methods used by watching the training sessions as their child participates.
- (c) Become aware that the Club has a duty of care to ensure the safety of players and therefore, where appropriate, parents should offer to assist coaches with the supervision of the players, particularly where numbers are large.
- (d) Become involved with Club activities and volunteer to share their expertise.
- (e) Share any concerns and praise with your Club officials.
- (f) Remember that young people play rugby for their own enjoyment not that of their parents.
- (g) Encourage young people to play - do not force them.
- (h) Recognise the efforts of players, not whether they win or lose.
- (i) Stay realistic about their child's abilities without pushing them to a level that they are not capable of achieving.
- (j) Provide positive verbal feedback during training and during matches.
- (k) Remember that negative messages will impact on both the players' and referee's performances and attitudes.
- (l) Assist the Club stop loud, coarse and abusive behaviour around the game.

- (m) Ensure that the young players learn good behaviour by example.
- (n) Always show respect for good play by all players from any Club.
- (o) Respect decisions made by the match officials, even if they appear to make a mistake, and encourage the players to do likewise.

The Club requires spectators to:

- (a) Act as good role models to all players.
- (b) Act responsibly in respect of verbal and emotional abuse to players or officials.
- (c) Acknowledge good individual and team performance from all players irrespective of the team in which they play.
- (d) Respect the decisions of match officials, even if they appear to make a mistake – they are all volunteers.
- (e) Never verbally abuse players, coaches, match officials or fellow spectators: such behaviour can create a negative environment for players and their behaviour will often reflect this.
- (f) Acknowledge effort and good performance rather than 'to win at all costs'.
- (g) Verbally encourage all players in a positive manner by shouting 'for', not 'at', the players.
- (h) Encourage all players irrespective of their ability - never ridicule any players.