



Tackling the Question?

Are we Tackling the wrong question?

If there is one subject that seems to split my colleagues in sport down the middle is the recent call to banning tackling in school rugby.

On the one hand there are those who cite the increasing body of evidence that shows the dangers of collisions and in particular concussion, highlighted in a recent medical journal <http://ind.pn/2y4yviv>

On the other, the many, who often cite their own positive experience of Rugby, claiming that the benefits outweigh the dangers and that banning the tackle is "health and safety gone mad". This view neatly summed up in a recent Daily Telegraph article. <http://bit.ly/2xEzu5S>

The first thing that seems to be lost in this discussion is a critical review of the evidence - Truth is, we don't have good measures of the injury rate in school rugby or a way of measuring the danger of any sport taught within the school environment. The evidence used for Rugby tends to be from the community game, where there are different levels of coaching and the young people playing are not typical of a PE Class.

My own observation is that few people are searching for evidence that would change their initial position - merely looking for things that back up what they already think, known in some of the popular psychology books as confirmation bias.

Like some of the debates in the political sphere, when we stop listening to the other side in a rush to back up our entrenched position, we lose an opportunity to make progress.



Overcoming my own bias, I see a number of important themes, all worth discussing in their own right: the purpose and value of school sport, the skills of those delivering it, bio-banding within rugby, the importance of the transition between school and the community game, the importance of schools to the elite player pathway.

Perhaps we may make more progress, at the expense of fewer catchy headlines, if we reframe questions to address these issues:

How might we balance the need to develop physical literacy for all with the opportunity to inspire some young people to get involved in community sport along with its health, and social benefits?

How might we create better guidelines to ensure that rugby can safely be delivered within schools with hugely varying resources?

How can we better understand the risks and benefits (short and long term) of sport both in school and in the community.

I for one would feel more engaged in those debates than in an emotional debate about tackling ...