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## ARPA – PERFORMANCE COACH THESIS

### IS RUGBY LOSING SIGHT OF IT'S CORE VALUES BY FOCUSING SOLELY ON SUCCESS?

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Rugby union is a sport that is built on values such as respect, teamwork, sportsmanship, and perseverance. These values have been at the core of rugby union since its inception in the 19th century. Over time, the sport has evolved and grown in popularity, with increased focus on success and winning at all costs. This has led some to question whether the sport is losing its core values in the pursuit of success. This thesis explores the question of whether rugby union is losing its core values by only focusing on success.

#### The Core Values of Rugby Union

Before discussing whether rugby union is losing its core values, it is important to understand what those core values are. The International Rugby Board (IRB) identifies five core values that are central to rugby union: integrity, passion, solidarity, discipline, and respect. These values are enshrined in the laws of the game, and are meant to guide the behaviour of players, coaches, and fans.

Integrity is possibly the most fundamental of the core values and refers to the honesty and fair play that is expected of all those involved in rugby union. Passion refers to the enthusiasm and love of the game that is shared by players, coaches, and fans. Solidarity refers to the sense of community and teamwork that is at the heart of rugby union. Discipline refers to the self-control and adherence to rules and regulations that is expected of all participants. Finally, respect refers to the courtesy and consideration that is expected of all involved in rugby union, whether it be towards teammates, opponents, or officials.

#### The Importance of the Core Values in Rugby Union

The core values of rugby union are not just abstract concepts; they have a very real impact on the sport and its participants. For example, integrity and respect are essential for maintaining a level playing field

and ensuring fair yet competitive competition. Passion and solidarity foster camaraderie and teamwork, powerful motivators for success. Discipline is essential for ensuring that the game is played safely and within the rules.

Perhaps most importantly, the core values of rugby union are what make the sport so unique and special. Unlike many other sports, rugby union places a strong emphasis on sportsmanship, fair play, and respect for opponents. This creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and admiration among players, and helps to build a sense of community and camaraderie that extends far beyond the playing field.

## The Danger of Focusing Only on Success

Despite the importance of the core values of rugby union, there is a danger that the sport is losing sight of these values in the with the pure pursuit of success. In recent years, there has been increasing pressure on rugby teams and players to perform at the highest level, with a focus on winning at all costs often due to the increased pressure from media, sponsorship deals and the increasing financial pressure clubs face.

This has led to a number of negative consequences, including increased aggression on the field to a decline in respect for opponents and officials. This singular pursuit of success has a dual impact on players, affecting both their mental health and the dignity of consistent improvement.

## The Focus of Improvement Amidst Defeat

It is imperative to recognise that success does not solely lie in victory. A narrow-minded focus on winning disregards the consistent improvements made by players and teams. Even in defeat, there can be substantial progress which is a testament to the spirit of rugby.

Focusing solely on success shines a negative light on the losing team, undermining the progress they may have made in terms of skill, teamwork, and overall performance. By acknowledging these improvements, the sport maintains its integrity and remains true to its core values.

Instead, we should be driving the goal that continual improvement or “playing your best” isn’t a loss just because a singular game is lost. A loss is a chance to learn and come back stronger. If we alleviate the pressure of the mentality of “anything but a win is a loss” we can not only drive down the aggression but also emphasise the importance of improvement. In turn, this sets a better example of what young players who are just starting out in the sport should be focusing on, creates improved game satisfaction and will increase the longevity of players remaining the sport while continuing their improvement in a healthy manor.

Furthermore, the pursuit of success at all costs can also lead to a lack of sportsmanship and fair play. In some cases, players and teams may resort to cheating or bending the rules in order to gain an advantage over their opponents. This not only undermines the integrity of the game, but also sets a bad example for young players who are just starting out or finding their path in the sport.

## The Importance of Balancing Success and Core Values

While success is undoubtedly an important part of rugby and something we will all strive for, it is crucial that the sport does not lose sight of its core values in the pursuit of such success. In order to maintain the integrity of the game and ensure that rugby remains a sport that is built on respect, sportsmanship, and fair play, it is essential that players, coaches, and fans remain mindful of these values at all times.

One way to achieve this balance between success, core values and the focus on improvement among defeat is through education, task focused training goals and a positive coach-led mindset. Rugby organisations and clubs can provide training and education to coaches on the importance of these values and how to incorporate these values into their training and playing strategies. This can help to create a culture of respect, improvement and sportsmanship among players and teams, and help to reinforce the importance of these values in the sport.

Finally, it is important for rugby organisations and clubs to always prioritise the core values of rugby union in their decision-making processes. This means making decisions that are consistent with the values of respect, sportsmanship, and fair play, even if these decisions may not lead to immediate success on the field. By prioritising these values, rugby organisations and clubs can help to ensure that the sport remains true to its roots, and that it continues to be a source of pride and inspiration for players and fans alike. Everyone looking out for themselves, but never putting themselves above the game.

## Conclusion

The question of whether rugby union is losing its core values in the relentless pursuit of success has unearthed some crucial insights into the essence of this our sport. Revisiting those five fundamental values of integrity, passion, solidarity, discipline, and respect – has emphasised the importance of keeping those values as the bedrock upon which the sport's unique character and community are built.

Exploring the dangers associated with an exclusive focus on success has illuminated the potential erosion of sportsmanship, respect, and mental well-being among players that the game is well known for. The proposition to redefine success, acknowledging improvement even in defeat, emerges as a transformative concept that aligns with rugby's central values.

Furthermore, this assessment points out the potentially harmful consequences of prioritising success at any cost. The call to focus on a balance between success, continuous improvement, and core values is a vital direction to safeguard the integrity of the game.

Taking this improvement-led model into consideration, it is important for rugby organisations, coaches, and players to embrace this outlook. The proposed strategies of education, task-focused training goals, and adopting a positive coach-led mindset offers a practical solution to anchor the sport firmly in its values while still pursuing excellence on the field.

Ultimately, the blend of these ideas' advocates for the rejection of a win as the only reason to feel proud and redefines the focus that some have on what is most important in the game. By doing so, we not only preserve the sport's unique spirit of the game, but also nurture an environment where players can thrive, grow, and contribute to the rugby community while standing as a pillar of respect, sportsmanship, and continual improvement. The evolution of rugby can build a path where triumph, success and personal growth coexist and the game we all love, all over the world can keep prospering for generations to come.

By Mathew Gordon