

Australia's National Rugby League's Player Development Framework: Evaluating Strategies (2019)

Wayne Usher

School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University, Queensland, Gold Coast, Australia
w.usher@griffith.edu.au

Rugby League (RL) is one of four football codes boasted across Australia; however, its participation rates are significantly lower when compared to other club sports, due to it being restricted to specific regions of Australia and viewed historically as a 'male only' sport. This is of particular concern throughout the junior competitions. Therefore, it is imperative that the National Rugby League's (NRL) future participation strategies adopt and reflect national / international 'best practices', so as to maintain and heighten positive and quality sporting opportunities, that are aimed to increase junior participation / retention, as well as build players' skills and personal development. The objective of this research is twofold, with the initial aim to demonstrate the clear alignment between the NRL's Player Development Framework (PDF) and national / international movements concerning shifts in junior sporting models. A secondary aim is to demonstrate the impact and participants' satisfaction levels concerning seven initiatives. A quantitative approach was employed to investigate participants' (children, $n = 916$; adults, $n = 20$) reported experiences from their direct involvement across the seven initiatives. Nine hundred and thirty-six (936) participants (youth between 4 to over 15 years, $n = 916$), seniors aged between 20 and over 41 years, $n = 20$) had data collected from seven initiatives, that were implemented across the five testing centres (Ipswich, Gold Coast, Brisbane, Toowoomba and Victoria) in 2019. The initiatives were identified as being the: 1) RISE ($n = 73$), 2) League Tag ($n = 330$), 3) Tackle Safe ($n = 168$), 4) 18-Month Policy ($n = 155$), 5) Development Competition ($n = 138$), 6) Community League ($n = 20$) and 7) Weight Related ($n = 52$). Participants were only required to complete the one online survey associated with the initiative they were involved in. Spearman's rho correlation (r) matrix was used to examine the strength of the association between variables, with p-values (p) employed to indicate statistically significant associations, at the one and two tail ($p < 0.05^*$ and $p < 0.01^{**}$). Results have noticeably indicated that the full suite of programs have been well received and have gone to meet and support the PDF's aims. Of particular note, is the high level of participants' agreement ($p < 0.000$) indicating that the programs significantly improved their level of: 1) confidence, 2) involvement, and 3) enjoyment. Importantly, data indicates that participants who identified with the aforementioned levels of agreement, were significantly ($p < 0.000$) and positively correlated with 4) higher levels of willingness to recommend each of the programs to peers.