

County (Bristol) School of Rugby Explained

Introduction

To clarify the structure and pathways for young rugby players is not easy. The traditional county structure of schoolboy rugby exists alongside an ever-evolving elite player pathway run through the RFU Elite Department and England Regional Academies attached to the Premiership clubs (since 2002). Rather than try to explain that structure, however, my main intention is to try and clarify the differences between the BSRU, the Bristol EPDG and the Bristol SOR for parents and players.

The Bristol Schools Rugby Union (BSRU)

At U15 and U16 level, Gloucestershire is treated as two counties, North Gloucestershire Schools, and Bristol Schools (BSRU) including South Gloucestershire Schools. All Bristol and South Gloucestershire schools are asked to nominate their best players to trials for the Bristol Schools, which are held in September. The U15s play several games but there is no progression from this. At U16 level, after playing against other counties, the best county players are picked for a Divisional team (the South-West). These compete in a Divisional Competition; the best players are then picked to represent the England Rugby Football Schools Union (ERFSU).

The Bristol Rugby Academy Elite Player Development Group (EPDG)

Bristol Rugby is franchised to run an England Regional Academy for outstanding players aged 16 plus who have the potential to play for England and get a professional contract. In preparation for this, Bristol monitors the progress of young players from 14 to 16 through the EPDG - players with the most potential who receive special attention. The RFU Elite Department run an England Rugby Regional Academy U15 12-a-side tournament in May each year. Bristol Rugby enters a team in this tournament. The Elite Department also run an U15 development camp in August each year for the 35 players in the country with the greatest potential.

The (Bristol) School of Rugby (SOR)

The purpose of the SOR is to develop core skills in talented youngsters who may have the potential to be a professional rugby player. The SOR is run by Gloucestershire RFU (which runs two county centres from U13s to U16 level - one in Bristol and one in Gloucester. Every county has at least one SOR with a national curriculum and programme which aims to identify, develop and monitor the progress of good young players over a period of time. They do not play any matches. The Bristol SOR provides a route for players into Bristol Rugby's EPDG. Bristol Rugby is represented on the SOR's coaching staff.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. How do you get selected to the Bristol SOR?

A1. The selection process to the Bristol SOR is:

- The Bristol Schools 16G and 15G Coaches nominate their best players to the SOR after their county programme so you need to get into the Bristol Schools teams. N. Somerset players are identified by a scout.
- Assessments sessions are held for U13 and U14 players who have been nominated by their school or club.

Q2. Am I eligible?

A1. Eligibility depends on:

- Attending a Bristol, S Gloucestershire or N. Somerset School or playing for a Bristol Combination or N. Somerset club
- Living in the catchment area i.e. BS post code
- Registering with Bristol (You cannot register with two Schools of Rugby)

Q3. How do I get nominated at U13 or U14 level?

A1. An email goes out to each school and club in Bristol, S Gloucestershire and N. Somerset asking for nominations from the teacher/coach. The teacher/coach first consults the player/s he/she thinks is good enough. If willing, the player is informed by the teacher/coach where and when the trials are. It is then up to the player to turn up.

Q4. Can a parent nominate me?

A1. Nominations from parents are not acceptable, only from coaches who know the quality of the player involved and whether he is outstanding or not. Understandably, parents tend not to be totally objective.

Q5. What if my teacher or coach forgot to nominate me on time, can I just turn up?

A5. It is not enough to just turn up on the day (you must be nominated by your club or school coach) because it puts pressure on our preparations. Imagine catering for a party for 10 people and each of them unexpectedly bringing a friend!

Q6. Can I get selected if I missed the trials for some reason e.g. holiday or injury?

A6. We have a number of players every year who miss the trials through no fault of their own. Previously we have invited the player for a trial period. This has been unsatisfactory because of the numbers involved and the potentially demoralising experience of saying to a player that he is not good enough. An alternative would be to have another assessment day, but where do we stop, if players miss this one as well? If this happens at U14 level and we know you because you were in the U13 SOR, your case will be considered. If you impressed the year before, you might well get selected even though you missed the trial. Finally, there is always another opportunity next year.

Q7. What happens after the SOR's annual programme is over?

A7. What next depends on your age:

- If you were U16 this year and do not get an invite to join the Bristol EPDG Silver Group (post 16), there will be opportunities later. Your pathway will be through Gloucestershire Schools U18.
- If you were U15 this year, we would expect you to be selected for Bristol (or Somerset) Schools at U16 level next season. If you cannot, it is highly unlikely you will be considered for the SOR.
- If you were U14 this year, we would expect you to be selected for Bristol (or Somerset) Schools at U15 level next season. If you cannot, it is highly unlikely you will be considered for the SOR.

- For U13s moving into the U14 age, everyone goes back into the mix. There will be an assessment day when your school and club coaches will again be asked for nominations
- Girls: If you are still U16, there is an open invitation to return and continue in the SOR. You must, however, let us know if you wish to take up this offer.