

Rugby Fives Strategic Plan 2021-2025

This document sets out the strategy for Rugby Fives food the 2021-2025 season. Here we outline the key initiatives in the three phases of the strategy: 'Sustain', 'Nurture' and 'Grow'. A full roadmap of the key initiatives as well as analysis of roles and responsibilities can be found in the full strategy document; which can be found by clicking [here](#), or by looking in the GSuite.

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Introduction

Executive Summary:

Fives is a sport that has been played and enjoyed for over 100 years in the UK. It is a court-based game where you hit a ball with your hands. Historically there were many different types - or codes - of fives. Nowadays there are two predominant codes – a three wall version and a four-wall version. Within the four-wall versions there are two variants, specifically Rugby Fives and Winchester Fives, which we will refer to collectively as “Fives”.

From as far back as the 1970s, Fives has struggled to tackle the same issues that have plagued the sport including disappearing courts, ball supply, and building new ‘centres’ for fives. There are several reasons that Fives has failed to adapt ranging from cultural shifts in the perception of sport (preference away from minority sports towards professionalism), to school resources (many Fives courts make excellent storage facilities or classrooms) to our own lack of progression and relevance within the fast-moving sectors that we operate.

The Rugby Fives Strategic Plan addresses the concerns of the Board and the wider community for the future of Fives. Within this document we outline the Board’s primary motivations, describe our strategic framework (sustain, nurture, grow) and detail a roadmap of initiatives with assigned responsibilities for the next five years.

Our strategic framework is divided into three sections: sustain, nurture and grow. For ‘Sustain’, we aim to prevent further contraction of the sport and maintain the key components of Fives. For ‘Nurture’, we aim to build on the foundations set and improve and develop Fives for its playing community. Finally for ‘Grow’, we aim to expand the sport as we know it today and strive for our long-term vision of opening up the sport to new players.

Signed President RFA

RFA Organisation:

The Rugby Fives Association Ltd. is a charity (no. 1136872) and a Sport England recognised national governing body for the sport of Rugby Fives.

In December 2019 the Rugby Fives Association consisted of the following:

- A charitable organisation (no. 1136872)
- A board consisting of 13 with 6 subcommittees
- 429 RFA paying members
- 21 Clubs affiliated with the RFA
- 34 Schools affiliated with the RFA
- 27 donors (ex-members)
- 600 estimated non-paying players
- 37 schools and universities with courts (see Appendix A)
- 5 Community venues and one other non-school facility (see Appendix A)
- A calendar with c. 30 National Tournaments, c. 250 School Fixtures, c. 40 Club and School Fixtures.
- An official website
- Official Facebook page (471 followers), Twitter (427 followers), Instagram (140 followers) & YouTube (88 subscribers)

Motivations for the 2021-25 Strategy:

The Board has recognised that there are several motivations for driving a new strategy across the Fives playing community in the UK. In this strategy we propose a three-step approach to solving this problem: first we will sustain the sport in its current form, then nurture it by developing new initiatives and finally begin to grow the sport through innovation and bolder expansionary strategies.

The Board has identified the following motivations for proposing its 2021-25 strategy:

1. **Fives is a fantastic game with huge potential** and is well positioned to become a leader in UK handball based sports.
2. **The Fives playing community has stubbornly refused to grow, remaining at fewer than 1,000 players since the 1970s.** The number of schools playing has declined steadily over the last 50 years, which has placed the status of Fives as a National sport under threat. This has been driven by a fall in player retention after school and difficulty in attracting new players to the adult game, which has a perception of being unattainable. In order to sustain Fives we must both develop pathways for players after school, and provide training and support for new players entering the game at community hubs. It is critically important to expose the game to as many people as possible in order to attract new players. This will require a network of volunteers, organisers, activators and paid development officer(s) to achieve this.
3. **Fives' current facilities are being underutilised**, which has resulted in several Fives courts being used for storage and even the closure of courts altogether. Firstly, we

need to promote more engagement in the schools and clubs that own the courts. We can achieve this by not being afraid of innovations to the game that will improve the experience for both new and existing players. Secondly, we need to improve the accessibility of the courts for local communities and develop sustainable community fives.

4. **Fives suffers from an 'elitist' reputation and a lack of diversity** on account of the majority of the courts being located at independent schools. As of 2020, we have 134 courts across the country, but only 5 of these locations are accessible to the community (See Appendix A). Whilst there are a few school locations that share their facilities with Adult clubs e.g. Derby, many are campus boarding schools that have proven inaccessible for growth of the sport for communities. To tackle economic diversity we need to address the lack of presence in major cities such as Birmingham, Liverpool, Sheffield and Glasgow. Fives is a cheap sport, which is well suited to these urban locations. We also need to reframe Fives as a welcoming community rather than a "posh" sport and encourage more women and ethnic minority groups into the game. To change the reputation of the sport we must first diversify the composition of players in the game. Following that there needs to be a coherent marketing campaign that demonstrates diversity in the sport and showcases our top amateur players.
5. **Fives has charitable status** as an organisation and aims to provide support for disadvantaged communities. We must strive for more and empower the Fives community to become volunteers and establish outreach programs. The RFA can help by facilitating training, supporting grant applications and providing the link between clubs / schools and other charitable organisations.
6. **Fives has been restricted by part-time staffing, underfunding and a lack of coaching resources.** This is a structural problem that needs to be addressed going forwards in order to sustain the sport. Until 2018 we operated solely with a board of volunteers, appointing our first Development Officer in May 2018. Whilst bringing in a development officer part-time has been a move in the right direction, there is a need for this position to be full-time as well as potentially having an additional role that focuses on funding and strategic issues. Funding these roles will prove challenging but these roles are critical for grant applications, expanding coaching resources and development of the game.
7. **Fives has not responded to innovations within the wider sport and culture ecosystems** and has been left behind as others have adapted to trends in the sporting industry (e.g. partnerships with other sports and increased visibility on social media). Whilst Fives and all handball sports share a history of variations and adaptations, there has been a lack in recent times of innovations in the game. Meanwhile, other sports have trialled and implemented innovations to great success e.g. Wall Ball makes use of rally points to speed up matches; tennis has adapted its courts, balls and court hire structure to maximise players. We are a Sport England recognised sport but have not used this status for growth nor partnered with other sports for growth. Tennis has incorporated new high growth sports in the UK such as Padel to support the rest of the game.

8. **Fives can do more to leverage its members and its social media presence.** There is huge potential in the Fives members community and a wealth of creative talent. Going forwards, there needs to be a clearer and more coherent marketing strategy that leverages Fives members and promotes the initiatives and objectives that the RFA is driving.

Overview of Strategy and initiatives

Mission Statement:

To sustain, nurture and grow the whole of Rugby Fives by leading, promoting and governing the game across the country. Whilst we aim to maintain the game's core values, we will embrace innovation and evolution to ensure it remains relevant and appealing for all players and stakeholders.

Vision:

- We will create exciting new opportunities for young people joining the game
- We will embrace innovative approaches to make Fives more accessible and more inclusive, particularly to our adult club players
- We will embed the Fives community around schools to inspire the next generation
- We will provide tournaments and events that are for our whole playing community
- We will drive the growth of outreach and volunteering within our sport to the rest of the community
- We will develop structures to facilitate fundraising, standardisations and ease of development
- We will celebrate, support and develop staff, organisers, volunteers and players throughout all levels of the game
- Our image will be recognised and respected by stakeholders

Values:

- Fives is an active, exciting game which can be played by both men and women of all ages and from all backgrounds
- Fives is welcoming and inclusive for young players, nurturing them through their sporting pathway
- Fives is accessible and inclusive of players in the community, providing a social hub
- Fives champions top amateur talent both for National competitions and into other sports and activities
- The RFA will provide guidance and advice for clubs and schools across the country
- The RFA is supportive of its staff, organisers, volunteers and players
- The RFA will raise awareness and enhance the image and reputation of Fives

Strategic Framework:

Our strategy is divided into three sections:

- **Sustain** - maintaining Fives and preventing further contraction of the sport
- **Nurture** - improving and developing Fives at a school, club and tournament level
- **Grow** - expanding and opening up the sport to new players, areas and communities

For each of the strategies within the strategic framework, we have identified important initiatives and activities and assigned the people responsible. These are measured against specific metrics and have been assigned a provisional target date for completion.

Strategy	Initiatives	Metrics	Date
Sustain	Activator course; National Events; Brand relaunch; Challenger Tournaments; Club Financing	Court utilisation metrics; National events participation; Social media engagement	2021
Nurture	Fives Coaching program; Player pathway for school kids; Club Development; Tournament restructuring; 'Top 20' Leadership	Number of RFA members; Retention of school kids; Regional tournament participation	2022/3
Grow	School brand campaign; Building new courts; Partnership with another sport; Fives outreach	Number of courts; Total number of Fives players	2024/5

Summary of initiatives:

We partition the initiatives into 'target areas' for the sake of clarity.

'Sustain' Initiatives (2021):

We have developed a timeline of initiatives for 2021 that are important for addressing the pressing issues within Fives and sustaining it for the future. These are all actionable initiatives that will provide the foundations for nurturing and growing the sport. The main areas of focus for 2020/21 are:

- Relaunching Fives by delivering a brand and marketing campaign that culminates in the 2021 Relaunch event
- Delivering fantastic events for Schools, Clubs and Tournament players that maximise enjoyment for all
- Piloting innovations in game formats, tournaments and rankings within Fives
- Laying the foundations for the RFA to support centralised tournaments, funding of clubs and development of the game in schools and universities

Target Area	Initiative	Person responsible	Date
School Fives	Activator Course: RFA certified course for 'Young Leaders' and staff / coaches with supporting materials	Development Officer, Marketing	2021
	Junior Fives: Trial new form of the game for juniors and standardise it (introductory game). e.g. soft ball, possibly on squash court	Development Officer, National Schools Organiser	2021
	National Schools: Regional qualifiers	National Schools Organiser, National Schools Group,	2021

		Marketing	
Club Fives	Club financing: restructuring club financing to leverage RFA charity status	Finance & Fundraising	2021
	Fives relaunch event: Wood Cup, fundraising, prizegiving and branding relaunch	2021 (Dave Butler, Matt Shaw, Tom Watkinson)	2021
Tournament Fives	Scaling up of Major Tournaments: National Singles and Doubles	Tournaments Committee, Marketing	2020/1
	Tournament Administration: RFA provides administration for tournaments centrally	Tournaments Committee, Webmaster, Marketing	2020
	Dynamic Rankings Software	Dave Hebden, Chris Burrows, Will Ellison	2021
	Challenger / Alternative Tournament Pilot	Tournaments Committee	2021
Marketing	Promotional materials: Website, merchandise, posters, videos	Marketing	2021
	Communications strategy: to the world, to the players, to the board	Marketing	2021
	Brand Relaunch 2021	Marketing	2021
	Support of other initiatives: tournament package and marketing materials for other other initiatives	Marketing	2021

'Nurture' initiatives (2022/23)

Following the progress made in the first year of this strategy we aim to build upon a number of initiatives and nurture the sport by:

- Formalising a coaching program for schools that builds upon the RFA activator courses
- Providing a clear pathway for school kids to adult fives supported by mentors within the 'Top 20'
- Increasing the number of adult players by supporting the growth of Fives clubs locally and by making tournaments more inclusive

Target Area	Initiative	Person responsible	Date
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School Fives	Fives Coaching Program	James Powley	2022
	Player Pathway for school kids: Transitioning from School to Adult Fives	Marketing	2022
Club Fives	Club Development: Socials, Club Matches and access to RFA resources	RFA Board	2022
Tournament Fives	Tournament restructuring to promote more inclusivity	Tournaments Committee	2022
	'Top 20' Leadership	RFA Board	2022
Marketing	Player Profiles	Marketing	2022

'Grow' initiatives (2024/25)

Finally, we outline a number of long-term aims that will help grow the sport long-term.

These include:

- Growth of the sport at schools by identifying and developing keen players, launching a specific school brand campaign and building new courts
- Partnering with another handball sport to increase our adult playing base
- Creating and launching outreach programs for communities

Target Area	Initiative	Person responsible	Date
School Fives	Development Squad for school kids	Top Amateur Player Group	2024/5
	School Brand Campaign	Development Officer, Marketing	2024/5
	Building of New Courts	RFA Board	2024/5
Club Fives	Partner with another sport e.g. Wallball	RFA Board, Dan Grant	2024/5
Fives Outreach	Set-up a Fives outreach program	Volunteering RFA Board member	2024/5
	Partner with other charitable organisations	Volunteering RFA Board member	2024/5
	Targeted community initiatives	Volunteering RFA Board member	2024/5