

## **2017 Non-Contact National**

With the FA finally coming forward and issuing a standardised set of rules that are due to be unveiled in February, it was only right that they came in at the point of the game's evolution by announcing a minimal contact game. That was generally the norm and any move away from that would not particularly have gone down well with the WF community.

Having observed, played and officiated in the game for nearly three years now, and with much feedback from emails, as well as feedback on the WFU Backchat forum, the WFU Committee voted that the proposal to reduce the National Tournament format from minimal contact to non-contact was taken for 2017. This has had mixed reviews, but generally the move has been welcomed.

It is a huge statement of intent and it could be said that it is felt that perhaps within two years all competitive games will be non-contact. Players and teams have in the last two years pulled out of competitive WF due to the usual constant running issue, but also largely because of the physicality in the game. Tackles are flying in, insidious bullying occurs, players are subtly roughed up. Defenders push into forwards and tackle for the ball from behind. All of the traits of a bygone era can be observed in this new game for gentle folk of senior years. Not so much though in the 60+ game it has to be said.

Aficionados, purists and the more physically enforcing participants of football will not welcome the move. Part of their game and advantage dwells in the allowance and covert operandi in a minimal contact game. Thing is, players are getting hurt. Injuries are more easily acquired at a senior age and the rehabilitation or healing process takes so much longer on ageing limbs. Players need to be protected from each other and themselves.

An exodus of even a miniscule amount is not good for the game. And why should the more physical teams be allowed to get away with forcing results upon teams enjoying a fun, fair and safe competition at the expense of a 'win at all costs' mentality?

Reducing the game to a non-contact format will not detract from the game. Of course players will come together on the ball, collisions will occur, timing will be out and clumsy challenges will go on. Defenders are not going to simply allow marauding forwards to walk the ball into the net. They will stand their ground and make timely challenges, or force a pass. Tackles will have to be clean. Nothing physical from the back or impact intervention from the sides.

Players will not be permitted to back into or have a physical presence piggy-backing around the pen area. Generally the game will be about the passing, the reading of play, intervention, quick give and go's. The negative physicality of the game will decline. With that ethos the playing field will be more level, teams will not decline participating and the bully boy antics seen all too often will diminish. A far more enjoyable, fair and safe game will be attained. It will certainly be a lot more easier for the referees to officiate in.

That is how the competitive game should be moved forward, and the sooner the better. Once people get their heads around the concept, embrace it, and enthuse in the joy of safe, fair football for all, will the game truly come in to its own wonder and justifiably be declared as 'the beautiful game.'