

Stunning England become World Cup favourites

Passion play: Football captain Harry Kane (left), and England scrum-half Ben Youngs (right). © Getty

Do you agree that these six points make rugby better than football? England may win glory on Saturday, but many are saying the real winners are the ethos and excitement of the game itself.

1. The players respect the referee. The level of abuse directed at the referee in football matches is unacceptable. At its worst, the players will get close to the referee in a threatening manner, while the fans shout with open rage. Put simply, rugby players understand that the referee is there to do an important job. They can disagree respectfully. Referees have a job to do: they are not the enemy.

2. There is less hooliganism. Rugby fans are not fenced off from one another in the stadium. They are trusted to sit together without fighting over the colour of someone's scarf. Football hooliganism has been a blight on the sport for decades, **marring** tournaments with the fear of violence and **racism**.

3. Players don't dive. We've all seen certain football players tumble to the turf after a feather-light (or non-existent) touch. On the other hand, a bruised rugby player will throw themselves into the **scrum**, doing everything they can for their team. It's not about getting hurt: rugby is played with more honesty.

4. It's an Olympic sport. In 2016, rugby made its Olympic come-back after 92 years, thanks to the sport's soaring popularity. It saw Fiji win its first-ever Olympic gold medal. Great Britain's participation in Olympic football has a long and tangled history, marked by **suspicion** between the organisers and the **FA**.

5. There's more than one way to score. In football, a goal's a goal. One point. Done. Rugby has tries, penalties, drop goals, conversions and penalty tries. This variety means rugby is a far richer, more interesting game, and also means there are fewer **draws**.

6. There are openly gay rugby players. There has not been a single openly gay football player in any of the Scottish or English **senior leagues** since the days of Justin Fashanu, who played in the 1990s. There are still issues with homophobia in rugby, but Keegan Hirst (player for English side, Halifax) said he was "overwhelmed" with support after coming out. Most recently, former Wales star Gareth Thomas, who came out in 2009, has publicly discussed his experience of living with HIV.

So, is rugby really better than football?

Own goal?

It certainly is, say some. Rugby is a game of sportsmanship, honesty and respect. While football players are renowned for their **debauchery** and materialistic streak, rugby is played in a positive spirit with strength and honour. It's not about arrogant star players. Compared with football, rugby has a rich culture, complex rules and a wonderful history. Bring on the final.

Not so, respond others. Rugby is elitist: the higher levels of the game are still widely restricted to a small group of public school boys. It is also needlessly complicated. Who really understands what happens in a scrum, or why we need it? Football is accessible to everyone. It unites us across divides. The passion of a nation getting behind its football team is unrivalled.

YOU DECIDE

1. Is rugby better than football?
2. Why are so few professional sportsmen openly gay?

ACTIVITIES

1. Draw the most exciting moment from England's win over New Zealand to commemorate the match.
2. Watch the match highlights in Become An Expert, then write a one-page match report with exciting language and facts.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

"The moral values I've learnt in my life, I've learnt through football."

Arsene Wenger, former and longest-serving Arsenal manager from 1996-2018

What do you think?

Q & A

What do we know?

England beat New Zealand 19-7 in the semi-final of the rugby World Cup in Tokyo, to progress to the final against South Africa at 9am on Saturday. New Zealand was the favourite to win the tie, having won the last two World Cup tournaments. Yesterday, South Africa narrowly beat Wales to set up the final with England.

What do we not know?

Who will win on Saturday, although England goes in as favourite after its convincing win over the reigning world champion, New Zealand. The odds of England winning are currently 8/13, but England coach Eddie Jones isn't paying attention. "We don't bet. We don't look at the bookies, we aren't concerned. Our expectation is to get better every day," he said after the semi-final.

WORD WATCH

Marring

Ruining; spoiling.

Racism

England's recent Euro tournament qualifying match against Bulgaria was halted twice amid fans' racist abuse directed at black England players. In the UK, Haringey Borough was forced to re-stage an FA cup match after racist fans saw the first match cancelled.

Scrum

A method of restarting play in rugby that involves players packing closely together with their heads down, and trying to win possession of the ball.

Suspicion

FIFA (the international footballing body) was concerned that the Olympics would lower the profile of the football World Cup, so professional players were long barred from playing.

FA

The Football Association, which governs the sport in the UK.

Draws

When both teams have the same number of points. In rugby, tries are worth five points plus a two-point conversion kick.

Senior leagues

There are four professional levels of English football, with the Premier League at the top and League Two at the bottom.

Debauchery

Indulgence in bad habits

