

My View of Walking Football

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“Football is a simple game made complicated by people who should know better.”

Bill Shankly (Liverpool).

This quote could not be more relevant than in Walking Football. The world needs a set of principles that is easily understood and universal. The game was created in Chesterfield, England as a format to help senior people into a healthier active lifestyle in **safety**. It has since grown into an international phenomena however, some in England who think they own the game is the cause of so much confusion by the Football Association (FA), who’s rules are taken from the original five-a-side game where it is stated. “5-a-side is a minimal contact game of skill, not aggression.” You only have to add no running to that and none contact and you have walking football.

However, the Walking Football Association have no accord with the FA claims to govern Walking football in England and indeed Internationally (Federation of International Walking Football Associations) if you believe their egos. This is where the confusion sets in. They show no agreement with anyone else who came before them or after and confuse a common set of rules with unnecessary alterations. Walking Football should be a non contact sport for obvious reasons, reasons that are overlooked in the name of “competition”. Common sense is the responsibility of all players. Non contact eliminates the risk of injury and provides confidence for all players to express their abilities without the fear of the unnecessary contact we know only too well and its expected when we play normal football in our youth.

The definition of “competition” is said to be “the activity or condition of striving to gain or win something by defeating or establishing superiority over others.” This is neither to the meaning, ethos or spirit of walking football for senior people. Winning is a natural condition for players of any sport but there are codicils in walking football that means there is a spirit of the game to observe, of respect for your opponent, consideration for your opponent and understanding of the reasons that rules are in place for protection against unnecessary injury. We should be aware in ourselves to eliminate as much possibility of accidents to ourselves and others with reckless, over physicality or aggressive play.

Skill, not aggression, is the fundamental guidance behind walking football. A win-at-all-cost attitude which has crept into the format through it becoming a competitive

sport. As a result it produces personal interpretations to the rules to gain unfair advantage. But it is possible to outscore an opponent fairly within the spirit of the game.

The other contentious aspect where players misinterpret the wording of the rule is "running" which is explained by having one foot in contact with the ground at all times. Thus we have the John Cleese silly walk entering walking football and a myriad of other definitions to the rule. One easy way of establishing walking is to regard the way we walk on the street and walk in a hurry to catch a train. I don't think this involves anything that would make one look stupid to the public so why do it playing walking football? It becomes more natural when you learn to lean back when you walk while swinging your hips and bent arms.

Three touch football eliminates most unwanted contact and it works to a degree. It also sharpens up reflexes and thinking. Speed of thought, reflexes and anticipation are what we should be looking for, not speed of legs or power of bodies.

Win with grace and humility, play to win hearts and minds and show that, as senior citizens, we can still have a young head on old shoulders. Whatever country you come from the principle is social activity, sportsmanship, friendship and consideration. Enjoy what you have - at our ages we win even in defeat.

What do you think? Has walking football becoming far too competitive? And how do we stamp out running?