

The Benefits of Touch – the sport for all!

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The sport of Touch originated in South Sydney, Australia during the mid-1960s and initially developed within Australia and across the Tasman, then globally, to become a widespread social and sporting activity for hundreds of thousands of people in many countries around the world of all ages and sizes, and from both genders.
- 1.2. The sport has now been recognised in many countries by respective government authorities and also has a significant economic impact based on domestic and global participant numbers and international competition. In the country of birth Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) confirms that the sport of Touch has more registered participants than Rugby Union and Rugby League combined:
 - 1.2.1. (Quote: While many Australians love their footy, across Australia the game of football comes in several different forms. The main variations are, in no particular order, outdoor soccer (also known as association football), indoor soccer, Australian Rules, rugby union, rugby league and touch football (a non-contact form of rugby league). In 2009-10, 1.2 million people aged 15 years and over (6.9%) participated in at least one form of football. Of those who did play football, most had played outdoor soccer (33%), touch football (22%), indoor soccer (20%) or Australian Rules (20%). Around one in ten footballers had played rugby league (9.5%) and a similar amount had played rugby union (8.0%) Unquote.)
- 1.3. At the international and elite level the inaugural test match event was conducted in Melbourne between Australia and New Zealand in March 1985. The International Sporting Federation (ISF), the Federation of International Touch (FIT) was established at the same time, with Australia, Fiji, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea as foundation members.
- 1.4. Since 1988 the Federation has delivered a World Cup tournament every four years with the last Touch World Cup delivered in Edinburgh, United Kingdom in June 2011. More than 1,750 participants and 100 referees from 27 countries were involved. The next Touch World Cup will be delivered in New South Wales, Australia in 2015.
- 1.5. The number of affiliated countries (FIT Members) has grown from 4 in 1985 to 41 in 2011, with a further 6 countries due for membership endorsement in 2012.

- 1.6. At the elite level Regional Touch Championships are scheduled in five structured zones (Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania – with a likely split between East Asia and Southern Asia) every two years. Other international test matches, together with domestic club and representative events are also conducted on a regular basis. Most countries deliver National Championship Tournaments.
- 1.7. There are a number of identified benefits to the sport’s popularity and increasing participation at the social / community and the elite / international levels. This document summarises the benefits of Touch – the sport for all!

2. Physical Attributes

- 2.1. Touch has a non-body contact nature and an associated low level of injuries – the sport is defined and identified by a physical ‘touch’ which requires, in accordance with formal, international and domestic playing rules, ‘*the minimum force necessary*’ to make contact.
- 2.2. Physical stature and strength are principally irrelevant – the sport is suitable for all shapes and sizes, big and small, tall and short.
- 2.3. Injury statistics, especially trauma occasioned by strong, voluntary, physical contact, are significantly reduced from the other forms of ‘football’ especially American football, Gaelic football, Australian Rules football, Rugby League and Rugby Union. Several research projects have confirmed this.
- 2.4. The game satisfies participants from the very basic to the highest elite levels of skill – at the varying standards of competition the sport satisfies varying levels of individual skill.
- 2.5. Touch is applicable to both genders – it is an ideal sport for both women and men, and is also most suitable for mixed gender competition, in which women and men compete in the same team against mixed gender opposition teams. The mixed form of Touch is most popular in Europe, promoting good health for all.
- 2.6. The game is applicable to most ages – from elementary school children, through adolescent teenagers and parents, to grandmothers and grandfathers, Touch offers varying degree of activity dependent on the needs of the occasion, community and the individual.
- 2.7. It satisfies a wide range of fitness levels – a sport suited to both the casual, community participant in the park competition through to the more competitive, elite representative requiring very high standards of fitness (strength, speed, power, agility and endurance).
- 2.8. Inclusive play is a key asset of the game – the interchange rules (changeover of players) offers all participants the opportunity to become involved in play – on several occasions during the conduct of the game. At the higher levels players may interchange as many as 12-14 times throughout a match.



3. Environmental Attributes

- 3.1. Minimal facilities are required, other than a field (pitch) of a reasonably level and cleared area, a ball and some line markers.
- 3.2. The playing fields or pitches should preferably be grassed (to allow / encourage diving to score or make touches), with an area approximately 70M x 50M. Dimensions and markings for international and other senior matches are quite specific, while more social games may incur less formal requirements.
- 3.3. The sport includes other disciplines – Touch can also be played on the beach or indoors with small modification to playing rules.
- 3.4. Player equipment – as the standard of competition increases from a purely social level, player identification requirements with numbered individual uniforms (upper garment, lower garment and footwear) are applied. No protective equipment is necessary and indeed any item of clothing considered a threat to others is not allowed.
- 3.5. All weather – the sport is suited to all weather conditions, summer and winter, with matches recorded in hot and cool climates, in rain, sleet or snow.

4. Team and Social Attributes

- 4.1. As a true team sport Touch provides all the benefits and team values inherent in operating as part of a group – relationship, strategic and behavioural. Individuals must work together to develop a successful team.
- 4.2. A sport like Touch, as for any other quality, amateur sport is based on the belief that the vital lessons and great value of a sport are learned from the honourable pursuit of victory, from the competition itself, rather than the outcome. While winning may be one objective amongst some elite participants, evolved attributes within the sport do not allow promotion of the concept of winning at all costs.
- 4.3. Touch is built on the purest tenet of honesty. When the playing rules are whittled down to the most basic act in a fine contact, there is only ever one player who really knows whether a physical touch was made. The game promotes the need for honesty and sportsmanship and in the youth area is liable to develop positive attitudes and character.
- 4.4. The sport has simple rules – the playing rules evolved from a form of non-contact Rugby League, have few technical elements, have had the need for few changes over 40 years and are easy to understand.
- 4.5. Because of the nature of the team requirements, both in attack and defence, Touch significantly enhances communication techniques and the importance of quality communication in personal relationships, avoidance of conflict and life in general. For youth, involvement in team sport is seen as a desirable alternative to gang membership or social isolation.
- 4.6. Touch is an ideal sport for girls and women.
- 4.7. There are proven social and behavioural benefits in mixed gender activities, given and accepting that in some countries for cultural reasons, groups may not wish to implement mixed gender competition. While some males may initially be seen to protect or avoid females in the sporting



environment, (we know how to play the game better), it does not take too long for those few to realise the significant value of including female team participants in all aspects of play.

- 4.8. Because of the physical requirements of the sport, adults and children may participate together in the same match or competition. Indeed, some competitions exist purely for family-based teams, mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers playing together. Positive improvements for example, in father-and-son and mother-and-daughter relationships, attitudes, generation gap issues and even discipline are often enhanced under such conditions. There are few other sports that can involve family based teams.
- 4.9. There is common worldwide agreement that youth sports programs can enhance motor, physical and social development. Because it is suited to the juvenile human specimen, Touch offers young players the opportunity for enhanced natural progression, together with participant satisfaction and peer enjoyment. As for other sports, avoiding disempowerment, social isolation and permanent injury, must be paramount.
- 4.10. Touch is a wonderful sport for inclusion in school Physical Education and generic curriculums. For both primary (elementary) and secondary age groups, the sport offers activity, skill development, social and teamwork parameters ideally suited to education systems. For teaching staff the preparation, execution and supervisory elements are both simple and minimal. Involvement also acts as a deterrent to negative and delinquent behaviour.
- 4.11. Touch clearly meets the motivation requirements for children participating in sport:
- 4.11.1. As a team sport they can be with their 'mates';
 - 4.11.2. The nature of the game allows for broad involvement of all of the team; and
 - 4.11.3. The skills are simple to learn and available to enhance through competition.
- 4.12. The Federation endorses and actively promotes technical education programs for both coaches and officials. Through the delivery of courses and workshops the safety and needs of the participants are highlighted, leading to sport experiences that foster positive emotional and physical outcomes.



5. International and Cultural Attributes

- 5.1. International sporting events foster goodwill between nationalities. Competition on the sports field surpasses many political and economic differences. Touch is a global sport played in more than 60 countries worldwide. Cultural exchanges through events such as the Touch World Cup and Regional Touch Championships encourage friendship, awareness and even peace.
- 5.2. Cultural exchanges are the result of numerous off-field activities at events and tournaments. While on-field competition is the prime reason for these gatherings, member countries report that it is the opportunity to meet and mix with different people at accommodation centres, food halls and down times, during social and off-field periods, that provide many of the great memories and experiences at major events.

- 5.3. Touch is suited to most global communities. Research has shown that cultural disadvantage contributes to an increased interest and even dependence on a few sports like basketball and football as a means of social capital. Touch is a non-racial sport. Playing particular sports may not have the achievement returns for either black or white students that had been suggested previously. Touch was introduced into Soweto, South Africa with great success.
- 5.4. Touch is a modern sport, created just 50 years ago. It is devoid of many poor characteristics and displays the more positive characteristics of secularism, equality, specialisation, rationalisation, quantification, records and even bureaucracy.
- 5.5. The FIT membership policy is unbiased and open. While political differences may cause concern and even conflict between some nations, FIT maintains a positive, apolitical, membership policy. Examples include Pakistan and India; Spain and Catalonia; China, Hong Kong, and Chinese Taipei, all of which are FIT Member Nations.
- 5.6. Bilateral international competition increases partnering, tourism and economic opportunities through enhanced relationships between regional countries. Examples include the regular Trans Tasman Touch Series conducted between Australia and New Zealand, and the annual Inter-Insular Touch Competition conducted between Guernsey and Jersey.

6. Economic Attributes

- 6.1. With minimal facility requirements and organisational demands, the cost of participation to the individual is not great. At the lower levels some team clothing may be necessary however local sponsors are often keen to support basic uniform costs.
- 6.2. Insuring Touch players against injury is most economical when compared with player insurance in most other 'football type' sports. Insurance premiums are often in the order of \$10 for a full year, compared to many hundreds of dollars for cover in other codes.
- 6.3. Through the creation of different affiliation structures and evolutionary development the sport of Touch has grown to the extent where individuals are now employed in some countries to deliver the sport. While primarily an amateur sport, there are also several parts of the world in which specialised corporate entities deliver Touch as a business.
- 6.4. Looking at different countries of the world, there is enough evidence to illustrate the interplay between sports and all major sectors of the economy including but not limited to socio-cultural dynamics, people's health, the environment, urban development, and public policy. This means that sports as a development sector has a bright future. While not a high profile sport at present, because Touch is a growing mass participation sport, there is some opportunity for the sport to develop into an economic asset. The investment in hosting tournaments is enormous and so are the returns.
- 6.5. Touch currently operates on a 'User Pay' principle. Sport tourists are a passionate, high profile, high-spending, adventure-seeking lot that often stimulate other tourism sectors. Their direct



benefit to a destination is cash. Sport tourism is a multi-billion dollar business, one of the fastest growing areas of the global travel and tourism industry.

- 6.6. While still embryonic in most capacities the global promotion of other products and services through sporting events and sports teams (marketing and merchandise) is on the increase. Most connections with supplies lie in the sponsorship area but due to the increasing participant base, especially in the region of social marketing, this would seem to have some lucrative potential for the innovative or astute operator.

7. Technical Attributes

- 7.1. As a quite modern sport, Touch continues to develop and enhance game skills. Older players attempting to transfer Rugby Union or Rugby League skills to Touch – usually only with part success, as the modern game requires different skill sets. However, teaching novices, juniors and those who have had little experience in other codes, is rather an easy task.
- 7.2. The sport of Touch as technical accreditation programs for coaching, officiating and for representative player selection. In this way, the passing on of knowledge can be achieved accurately, timely and safely, knowing that those responsible for imparting technical expertise are properly qualified.
- 7.3. Education programs exist for participants from grass roots (community level) to elite (international level). These programs are transferable, allowing graduates to move globally with a qualification gained within one of the technical programs.



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