

The role of Rounders in building communities and addressing inactivity

Learning Report and Toolkit

A partnership between: Rounders England, Yorkshire Sport Foundation and Ready Steady Active



A partnership between



Short on time..... here is the summary

Why Rounders?



Rounders can have lots of rules and can be highly tactical. But the basics are simple: bowler bowls to a batter who tries to run round four bases. When people are new to Rounders the rules can be stripped right back to make it accessible and easy to start. But its other features include: Anyone of any age can play so mothers, grandmothers and daughters can all play together; It is a sport with different elements to it: throwing, batting, bowling, running, tactics, umpiring so everyone can find their niche; It is a competitive game but there are lots of rests so people can take part even if they have been inactive for a while; It is played in single sex teams and there is no strict dress code. This means women can wear hijabs and can cover in any way that suits them.

‘It’s nice to play and interact with people of all ages, especially those double my age. It helps me to understand that you can balance sports even when you have important family commitments i.e. when you’re a mum’

What difference does it make?



Rounders can help reach audiences traditionally disengaged from sport and physical activity. In our research nearly half of those involved were women aged between 35 and 44 and a fifth had a long term illness. **78%** identified as having an Islamic or Muslim faith. Over half of women that took up Rounders were not consistently active before playing the sport and **90%** of those involved were new to Rounders. **76%** of women increased their physical activity levels because of playing Rounders. But it also has a wider range of benefits: **95%** of people have met someone from a different background and **87%** have improved their mental health.

‘I became more physically active, I attended training sessions regularly so I was able to get a regular workout which I had struggled with after having kids. I also started doing more for myself including attending the gym at least twice a week on top of playing rounders’

‘It gives me a sense of purpose outside of my usual responsibilities, it gives me more confidence’

How can you develop Rounders?



Rounders in West Yorkshire has grown in an organic way. Teams have developed independently and volunteers have stepped in to get teams going and then growing. But in West Yorkshire, Ready Steady Active also play an important role. They have provided mentoring and support to the teams as they have developed. They have also created opportunities for teams to compete against each other as a stepping stone to the West Yorkshire league. Nearly half of participants in our research came to Rounders because of connecting with Ready Steady Active. Our learning for others includes:

Working with a local trusted organisation; arranging sessions in safe, largely women only environments; offering opportunities for competition; supporting and mentoring people to progress: both in the support and in running the sport; creating environments that combine sporting development with caring for people.

Introduction

In Spring 2023 a consortium of partners including: Rounders England, Yorkshire Sport Foundation and Ready Steady Active came together to understand the role Rounders played in getting people active.

In West Yorkshire, Rounders is a growth sport. In particular, it is played by adult women from a wide variety of different ethnicities and backgrounds. In other words, it is played by those groups traditionally seen as 'hard to reach' by organisations interested in reducing inactivity.

The growth of Rounders in West Yorkshire has been organic. But a local organisation, Ready Steady Active, has played a key role in supporting, mentoring, encouraging and profile raising of the sport and helping women see the sport is for them. In addition, they have created practical opportunities for people to enter the sport by providing opportunities for people to play informally and opportunities for teams to compete against each other.

This learning report aims to show a wide range of audiences interested in sports development:

- Why Rounders works as a sport to help get inactive people more active by addressing some of the key barriers people face to being active
- Who sports like Rounders reach and the wider Sport for Development work it can support
- What the key features that Rounders in West Yorkshire is built on and so what others may need to do in order replicate the success

It is based on engagement with over 65 women involved in Rounders in West Yorkshire.



About Rounders

Rounders is a sport with a curious combination of high and low awareness. Most people who went to school in the UK will have played Rounders at school. But both elite and grassroots Rounders is much lower profile among adults.

Rounders England is the National Governing Body for the sport and are working hard to make Rounders more visible, with a particular focus on using Rounders as a tool to tackle inactivity and to promote community development by connecting communities through Rounders.

The people involved in this research identified Rounders England as an approachable governing body who are inclusive to the Rounders community. This includes making their Annual General Meetings open so players can be involved and developing a talent pathway and Golden Tickets to give more people the opportunity to take part at the national level.

The Basics

Rounders is a game that can be played indoors or outdoors it is played by:

- Two teams with 9 people per team
- Each team is batting or fielding
- The game consists of two innings with 27-30 balls per inning
- Running around the bases results in a full or half Rounder
- There are four bases, a batting square, fields, back stop, a bowler and a batter
- Fielders are based anywhere with key positions on: the bases; back stop and bowler
- Each game has two umpires, one watching the batting, the other the bowling

Rounders can have lots of rules and can be highly tactical. But the basics are simple: bowler bowls to a batter who tries to run round four bases. When people are new to Rounders the rules can be stripped right back to make it accessible and easy to start.



Understanding Inactivity

Inactivity is complex and the reasons why people are inactive are varied. Inactivity is also not a fixed feature of our lives. Shephard & Moyes Ltd has been doing research since Covid-19 which suggests people are constantly moving from periods of inactivity and periods where they are more active. The reasons for the change (both positive and negative) is often associated with transitions. For example, starting a family, starting a new job or having a change in health status.

26%

of adults do less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week (Active Lives Survey)

1 in 6

deaths associated with inactivity

Our research highlighted that:

- **Over 70% of people** identified family and work commitments as barriers
- **Over a third** identified cost, confidence and ongoing pain or injury as barriers
- **Male dominated spaces** are a barrier to some women taking part in sport

‘Having time is the ultimate barrier for me. Finding work/life balance is difficult so finding time for my physical fitness is also difficult’

‘All the way through till I was 16 I was very active, I was very much into sport, but when I finished school there wasn’t a lot of provision for girls, specifically for Asian girls, so I didn’t do anything after that, just basic walking. I only got back into sport when I heard about Rounders’

Helping people be more active

The data we collected through our research shows that Rounders is helping women be more active.

55%

of women who took up Rounders were not consistently active before they played

Women told us how the sport created a reason and purpose to be active and Rounders motivated them to get fit in their wider lives. Rounders in West Yorkshire achieves these changes because it takes practical steps to overcome the barriers women face to taking part in sport.

‘I became more physically active, I attended training sessions regularly so I was able to get a regular workout which I had struggled with after having kids. I also started doing more for myself including attending the gym at least twice a week on top of playing Rounders’

90%

of women were new to Rounders

There are opportunities for families to play together so women don't have to make a choice between being active and spending time with their families.

‘The Rounders sessions were at times which worked around the family and work commitments. I didn't know anyone when I first attended, however made some great friends which helped my confidence’

76%

increased their levels of physical activity

The timing of sessions and matches is key to this. Rounders is also a relatively cheap sport to start with as there are no specific costs to attend a session for the first time.

How does Rounders help

Rounders has some important features that make it more accessible than other team sports.

Features of the game:

Anyone of any age can take part. This means grandmothers, mothers and daughters can all play together.

Perhaps less immediately obvious is when playing a competitive game there is plenty of time for rests. This means women returning from child birth, injury or a period of inactivity can still play the game because they can play at a pace that works for them and their current fitness levels.

It is also a sport that has many different elements to it. So everyone can find a niche and an area of the sport they are good at.

It is also an extremely tactical game. This means even if fitness levels have dropped someone can still be an integral part of the team helping other players think about when and how to run.

Finally, it can be played in single gender or different gender teams and there is no strict dress code. This means women can wear hijabs and can cover in a way that suits them. Rounders can take account of cultural and personal preferences.

All aspects of the sport from training to competition can take place in a women only environment. Across West Yorkshire, the teams and leagues take account of this and consider how open or private a venue is before considering it for a competition.



How does Rounders help

Rounders also provides people with motivation and the opportunity to be competitive. Competition helps drive motivation and engagement.

Our research highlighted that:

- **Improving mental health; having fun and keeping fit were the top motivators to being active**
- **For two thirds of people competition was an important motivator**
- **Playing Rounders gives women time that is just for them**

Our research has highlighted that competition plays an important role in motivating women to take part in Rounders and to train and improve. Even people who thought they would not be competitive get involved as their confidence increases.

Although women in the research identified there were cultural expectations placed on them around competition, Rounders was a sport that was flexible enough to allow them to be in predominantly women only environments and to cover (clothing) even when competing.

‘I actually thrive [on the competition] you know when I hear about a match, I'm like, yes, I want to play. You know before when I started Rounders I was like a bit like, I'm not gonna play any matches they said 'okay that's fine' I don't really want to play, I just want to watch, I just want to train and just take part. But then, once I got a taste for it, that was it, I was hooked on, and now I really really look forward to it when we have a match on, I'll kind of plan my whole day around the match'

Case study: Batley Ninjas

Batley Ninjas formed in 2015. Ready Steady Active were running a Rounders programme that was providing opportunities for women to play socially and recreationally. As part of this teams were formed and with support and encouragement from this initial session the Batley Ninjas formed.

They became a constituted team and players have gone onto become Level 1 and Level 2 qualified coaches and some of the players are on the Rounders England pathway.

The team are competitive, they want to win. But there is also a big element of making friends and keeping social connections but it also gives them a focus outside their normal daily routine.

Batley Ninjas have appeared in the Wall Street Journal, Sport & Physical Activity Professional and Glorious Sport. These articles have all highlighted it not just the fitness and health benefits it is also the friendship and bond that is built between the team mates.



Sport for Development

As well as being used as a tool for tackling inequality, we found Rounders could also be used to generate positive social outcomes.

Reach:

Rounders in West Yorkshire reaches a diverse audience that are traditionally under-represented in sport and physical activity. The data we collected shows 31% of people who identify as Asian are inactive and 36% of Asian women are inactive. All those involved in our research have been women, nearly half are aged between 35 and 44. A fifth of people identified as having a long term illness and 78% identified as having an Islamic or Muslim faith

Improving Community Connections:

95% of people who took part in Rounders have met someone from a different background. This helps highlight how the sport is helping to bring people from different communities together

Improved mental health:

87% of people felt their mental health had improved as a result of playing Rounders. 85% felt they had more social connections. The people taking part in the research told us how playing Rounders provided them with a sense of purpose. They also identified how the team aspect provided them with a sense of belonging

‘I enjoy competitive outdoor sports and I think Rounders provides that exercise but also the social aspect as well’

‘It keeps me a sense of purpose outside of my usual responsibilities, it gives me more confidence’

‘Attending sessions definitely improves my mental health, every time I come back from a session I feel much better and it motivates me to carry on’

Making it work

Rounders has grown organically in West Yorkshire but there have been important interventions that have helped the sport grow. This includes having a local, trusted organisation who has actively promoted Rounders and created opportunities for teams to compete informally. There has also been a strong culture of supporting people to progress either in the sport or in the administration of the sport.

The role of a trusted organisation

The Rounders teams are self-organising and the teams all manage themselves. However, a local organisation, Ready Steady Active has played an important role supporting women from South Asian communities in West Yorkshire to be active.

This has involved offering women the opportunity to play sport in women only environments, at times that suit them and sports they enjoy. This has included Rounders but also includes basketball, football and more traditional aerobics and circuits.

Ready Steady Active has also used small pots of money to offer starter sessions, so people can try Rounders for the first time since school. They also run informal leagues and tournaments so people can develop their competitive skills in a safe and friendly environment.

Ready Steady Active could signpost people they met, through their wider sports development work, to Rounders teams. They could also provide mentoring and support to help people running the clubs.

‘In celebration of international women's day an event was held and at the event Rashida spoke about Ready Steady Active. After which I joined the taster sessions and from there joined Batley Ninjas, as a few of their players attended too’

Nearly half of people involved in our work had become involved through a connection with Ready Steady Active, a further 40% found out through word of mouth.

In total, 90% of people became involved in Rounders because of a trusted connection recommending they should take part in the sport.

Another important feature of Ready Steady Active is it has been working in this area for 9 years. They offer a longevity to their presence around the sport. This is hugely important as the women involved in the research identified it could take them months to pick up the courage to attend their first session.

‘It took me about six months to finally get the courage to ask about it’

Making it work

Progression

One of the features of Rounders in West Yorkshire is that people have been encouraged to progress in the sport.

Nearly two thirds of people have progressed in some way in the sport with 40% training to be a coach, leader or umpire.

The value of supporting these progression opportunities is clear. For some it has increased their understanding of the game.

'And then I did the umpiring course as well, so I've qualified as an umpire... and you know what doing the umpiring course, has actually helped me to play better because I understand the game so much better, understand the rules so much better... but if you know the rules as well you can take advantage of an opportunity'

'I am a qualified level 2 coach and help to coach both the adult team, Batley Ninjas, as well as the junior team, Batley Ninjettes. I am also due to take my test to qualify as an intermediate level umpire, currently qualified as a preliminary umpire'

'I have co-managed BatGirls Rounders Club from its inception. I spend many many volunteer hours to help achieve this. I am now a Regional Coach, National Coach and Tutor for Rounders England. BatGirls Rounders Club players play in local leagues, all the way through to playing at elite level for Rounders England as part of the 2023 Talent Squad'

For others, it has meant they have helped grow the game by creating new teams and providing opportunities for children to play competitively.

'I have helped coach a new team in Huddersfield, I regularly umpire for WYRL and have helped in tournaments for children'

Progressing in the sport has also supported people with their own personal development.

'My confidence has increased immensely. I feel confident enough to help others learn how to play, to the extent I have been able to qualify as a level 2 coach. I feel better in myself which in turn helps me with better focus in other areas such as work and family. Rounders has also helped me to stay active and be able to keep up with my 2 boys!'

'I have developed as a strong sports leader as part of my Rounders journey. I am now a Regional Coach, National Umpire and Tutor for Rounders England. I have picked up strong leadership skills including management, negotiation, motivation, mentoring, and navigating difficult situations and being a role model'

Replicating success

West Yorkshire has shown a Rounders community will grow. A local, trusted organisation in Ready Steady Active helped kick start teams and competition. Crucially they understood the local area, had longevity that went beyond various pots of money and from day one worked in an encouraging and supportive way so a culture of progressing both in the sport and the sports delivery was developed from the start.

To develop Rounders in your community consider the following elements:

- Work with an existing local organisation who has good links with the community and has longevity. They can then be supported to offer and develop Rounders. The research has shown it can take up to 6 months for a woman to feel confident joining a group, so an organisation that has visibility and longevity in an area is key
- But be mindful of cultural preferences. Ensure there is a women only environment available. Make it clear the dress code is flexible and get the right representation on marketing materials to support this
- Organise sessions that work around family and work commitments of the community you are working with. Explore if actively promoting activities like mother and daughter sessions will help people engage
- Don't always start with all the Rounders rules, allow for entry level participation and don't always play the full game straight away
- Be wary of stereotyping. The women involved in this research were and are competitive. Although people might not want to compete on day 1, it is likely as confidence increases, so to will their competitive spirit
- Put as much focus on the social side of training sessions as the physical activity and skills development. Book the space to allow for 20 minutes before and after the session for people to get together and spend time with each other
- When delivering or coaching the sessions, focus on the people in the group and look at how you can develop the social connections in the group. Help shy people connect to other people and put a focus on making people feel good about the progressions they have made
- From the first day a session starts or people join think about how they can progress in the sport and in delivering the sessions. This means gently pushing people outside of their comfort zone and building a relationship of trust so they are happy to try different things
- Once a session is established, actively encourage those people taking part to act as ambassadors for the sport. Encourage posting on social media and getting them to bring in their friends and family

Interested in finding out more?

If you have any questions please get in touch on amy@shephardandmoyes.co.uk
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