

A new chapter for Touch Rugby

O2's 25-year partnership with England Rugby moves into a new phase from the start of the 2021/22 season following its pledge to equally fund the men's and women's game.

The increase in investment to support the growth and development of the women's game marks the start of an exciting new chapter of the partnership. Together, England Rugby and O2 aim to boost the profile of women's rugby, grow the army of Red Roses' fans, build crowd attendance, increase broadcast reach and inspire more women and girls to play rugby.

What this means for O2's sponsorship of Touch?

The revised focus means O2's title partnership of Touch rugby will draw-to-a-close after 10 hugely successful, exhilarating years in which O2 has helped to grow support for non-contact rugby.

During the past decade, England Rugby, O2 and O2 Touch Centres have worked side-by-side to develop a thriving Touch rugby community. Almost 40,000 players have participated in O2 Touch across the country, with 520 registered O2 Touch Centres, over 2,000 O2 Touch ambassadors supporting the format and over 4,000 O2 Touch app downloads.

Alongside success on the pitch, players and supporters have enjoyed all the fun and friendships created on the O2 Touch circuit, from O2 Touch Tours with Ugo Monye, Maggie Alphonsi and Dylan Hartley (to name a few) to virtual DJ parties in more recent times during lockdown. Together we've enjoyed the O2 Touch exhibition at Twickenham Stadium during the Quilter Internationals 2018, playing with both the Senior Men's and Women's England Rugby teams, and seen the Senior Men's team off to Japan in style in 2019 from a unique event in Bristol attended by thousands of fans.

We are looking forward to continuing these successes with Touch Centres and players under a new name.

What comes next?

O2 Touch will be known as **The Touch Union** from **1 September**. There are a few proposed changes based on feedback from players, but these will be flexible so that rules can be adapted to best suit your club or players, subject to final approval.

More details will follow over the next few weeks but we know change often brings about questions and we hope to have answered any you have today in our [frequently asked questions](#) section online.

Summer Celebration Events

There is still a great summer programme ahead as O2 continues its support this season with regional events taking place on 17/18 July in Bristol, Nottingham, Whitley Bay and Warrington Park – contact O2Touch@rfu.com for more information.

O2 Head of Sponsorship, Gareth Griffiths said: *"O2 Touch has been a huge success and we're very proud of the legacy we have built together with England Rugby. As our long-standing partnership evolves we are continuing to invest in the sport we all love, with equal funding for the men's and the women's game and a collective ambition to grow the profile of the Red Roses. Together we aim to increase the interest and audience levels and inspire even greater participation in rugby."*

England Rugby Chief Commercial Officer Simon Massie-Taylor said: *"I'd like to thank O2 for their incredible support over 25 years, having stood side-by-side with England Rugby since the game"*

became professional. O2 has played a significant part in helping grow Touch into a widely played non-contact format of the game and the future of Touch Union looks very bright as a result."

Steve Grainger, RFU Director of Rugby Development commented: *"Non-contact forms of the game, including O2 Touch, have been hugely important to rugby union during the pandemic and will continue to be as our game opens-up. The introduction of Ready4Rugby a year ago has given us an opportunity to review and discuss with players, coaches and clubs the elements of non-contact rugby they most value. As a result, changes to Touch rules are being put in place for the start of the 2021-22 season that are flexible and adaptable to suit players and clubs. We are confident these changes will have a positive impact on Touch in the long-term and aid transition to the 15-a-side game for those players who wish to."*

Thank you O2 for all the fun you've provided along the way and thank you to players and Touch Centres for the immense part you've played in that fun and success. Here's to an exciting new chapter for Touch rugby and we look forward to seeing everyone on the Touch Circuit soon as we continue the ride.