

Rugby Runner

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Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

The Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) has the honour of hosting the inaugural U-16 Rugby World Cup. They decide to stage an interprovincial competition to find players for a representative and competitive national squad.

Eoin Madden is already the lynchpin of Castlerock College's Junior Cup team; now he is determined to play a full role in the national competition as well. He progresses to the provincial team, vying with the other provinces' U-16 talent to be selected for the national panel and to secure a green jersey.

The action pulses with excitement as Eoin negotiates the trials and successes of preparation and selection. He uses his personal strengths and skills to support his teammates as they pursue the Junior Webb Ellis Cup, and help to recover the trophy when it is stolen.

Some of the themes explored are:

- Loyalty
- Rivalry
- Sportsmanship
- Friendship
- Patience
- Gamesmanship
- Frustration

SUMMARY

Still basking in the glow of his participation in the summer tournament at Twickenham, and with his place in the Leinster squad secure, Eoin Madden prepares to return to Castlerock College for a new term.

As the Castlerock friends are reunited, they are excited to learn that the IRFU will host the U-16 World Cup. An interprovincial competition will be held to identify and develop talent for the national squad, and the boys are determined to get selected.

Eoin is reunited with his ghost pal Brian, and

soon he meets none other than the ghost of William Webb Ellis – after whom the Rugby World Cup trophy is named – who has been summoned to the present but cannot understand why.

The training camps provide many tests of mettle and character. The friends rise to the challenges as the final shape of the squad emerges.

The theft of the famous Webb Ellis trophy while on display at the tournament casts an embarrassing shadow over the competition, but it clarifies the reason for the ghost of William Webb Ellis's unexpected appearance.

The trophy restored, the final matches pit Eoin and his team against the best young players in the world as they battle for the right to raise the World Cup for team and country.

APPROACH

This story is fast-paced and lively, with characters who are solid and relatable. The themes fit easily into PSHE / PDMU and will facilitate a discussion-based approach to the novel.

This guide has divided the story into three sections; the activities offer suggestions on developing the book's major themes.

Section 1 Leinster Interpro Pages 7–63

SUMMARY

Nursing his bruises from a recent performance at a European tournament in London, Eoin has to forgo his mother's cooking to stay on his Leinster diet plan. He takes the opportunity to visit his granddad, Dixie, before he returns to boarding school in Dublin.

Later, Eoin and his dad collect Dylan for the drive back to school. Eoin overhears Dylan's mum reminding him of the doctor's advice to avoid playing for a while due to his recent concussion injury.

Back at school, the boys catch up with their schoolmates and share the excitement of their adventure at the Twickenham tournament. Eoin and Dylan learn of the IRFU's plans for the Junior World Cup.

Eoin meets Charlie, a useful new addition to the school team, and renews his friendship with Brian, his ghost pal, who tells him of the appearance of new and agitated spectre from the past who seems to be searching for something.

After comfortably winning their first match, Eoin discovers that influence can be as effective as talent when Marcus McCord secures a place on the Leinster squad using his godfather's contacts.

Dylan is dropped temporarily from the school panel for safety reasons. He blames Eoin for releasing the information about his concussion, souring the atmosphere for everyone.

The first interpro tournament in Limerick delivers mixed fortunes for Leinster, as all the players try to impress in advance of the selections for an Irish jersey.

Eoin allows himself to be distracted by McCord's arrogance and disrespect for the coach.

The second day of the tournament proves better with a comprehensive victory for Leinster, restoring their chances of emerging as overall winners.

Taking the opportunity to spend some time at home, Eoin meets his granddad Dixie and discovers a connection between his village and the agitated spirit Brian had mentioned, the spirit Eoin himself saw while he was in Limerick.

Discussion points:

- **Read p16:** There have been reports in the media of young people suffering serious injuries while playing rugby. Officials now recommend a 23-day suspension after a concussion. Is this enough? Is rugby a suitable sport for children? What changes could be made to make it safer?
[www.irishrugby.ie/downloads/IRFU-Guide-to-Concussion\(2\).pdf](http://www.irishrugby.ie/downloads/IRFU-Guide-to-Concussion(2).pdf)
- **Read p22:** Eoin's mum feels that he should be studying harder for the Junior Cert. At Castlerock, however, the priority seems to be playing rugby. Is this fair on the pupils? Should competitive sport be restricted to non-examination years?
- **Read p46:** Eoin is seething at Marcus McCord's display of disrespect towards the coach. He sees the effect it has on team spirit as the boys take to the field. What is the difference between a team and just a group of players? How do you know if you're part of a team? What is needed to transform a group of players into a team?
- **Read p48:** Although McCord is clearly rude and challenging, Ted the coach is prepared to accept this from him. What other influences do you think Ted has to deal with? Should the coach be free to make his selection based on talent alone? What could Leinster do to make sure this happens?

ACTIVITIES

1. Leinster Dos and Don'ts (read p13)

Eoin remembers the advice in the Leinster Junior Academy players' handbook and chooses a glass of water over a fizzy drink.

Diet is important, not only for athletes but for everyone, to help promote general good health.

Work in small groups to research a healthy eating plan for your age, highlighting foods you should avoid or eat less of.

How could you present your plan to encourage your friends to follow it?

The sites below might help.

kidshealth.org/en/kids/go-slow-whoa.html
www.foodafactoflife.org.uk/site.aspx?siteid=15&t=2

2. Disappointment (read pp20 & 32–34)

Both Rory and Dylan face disappointment when they are not selected, and both have difficulty dealing with their feelings.

They need help and a simple plan to deal with their feelings in a healthy way.

Create a three-step plan, with strategies the boys could use to help them deal with disappointment.

www.more4kids.info/734/kids-and-sports-handling-disappointment/

3. McCord (read p33)

Marcus McCord asks his godfather for help to get on the squad.

His godfather agrees to use his influence to help Marcus. He emails the chairman of the Leinster board, whom he knows.

He has to be careful that his email isn't too obvious, but at the same time it has to be clear that he wants his godson to be included in the squad.

Help him to write the email.

4. The U-16 Jersey (read p36)

The U-16 World Cup is a completely new competition for the IRFU, and they decide to commission a new design for the jerseys rather than using a smaller version of the senior kit.

They are organising a competition for the new design. Could you create an entry?

5. McCord-stein (read p55)

As he sleeps, Eoin has a nightmare vision of McCord as a Frankenstein monster.

In the morning he laughs about it, but he decides to create a poster of the monster likeness.

Can you help Eoin create a suitably ludicrous poster?

6. Texting is EZ (read p57)

Eoin replies to Alan's text, but he is confused by Alan's texting code.

Alan decides to create a 'help sheet' with the top twenty 'text speak' words that he thinks Eoin will find useful.

Help Alan to compile a list of common phrases and their text equivalents for Eoin.

7. The Ball (read p62)

Dixie gives Eoin lots of useful information on the origins of rugby, the Rugby School and the role of William Webb Ellis, however he forgets an important and interesting piece of information.

There is no detail on why the rugby ball is a different shape from the balls used in other sports, and the purpose of that shape.

Do some research on the shape of the rugby

ball and create a short, clear note with dates and illustrations that Eoin can use for his school project.

Section 2 Ireland's Call Pages 64–122

SUMMARY

Wakened from his sleep, Eoin finds that a ghost has materialised in his bedroom and is combing the shelves in search of something. A brief introduction confirms that he is indeed William Webb Ellis, before Eoin's dad disturbs them and Will disappears.

Dixie arranges a reconciliation meeting for Eoin and Dylan. They resolve their issues and are friends again.

At the Leinster training camp before the interpro, Eoin discovers that the coach was given no choice but to include Marcus McCord on the team. McCord wastes no time in displaying his boorish behaviour.

Back at school, Alan has analysed the statistics and informs Eoin that Leinster will have to beat Ulster by eleven clear points in the final to win the competition.

Eoin takes Alan with him to meet his ghost pal Brian. They learn that the spirit of Will has been seen again, agitated, trying to understand the reason why he has been summoned into the present.

To his disgust, Marcus McCord is not included in the starting lineup to face Ulster. However, he manages to exert his influence to ensure he runs out at half time, promptly fumbling a pass and then earning a yellow card.

Aware they need to win by a margin of eleven points, Rory and Eoin devise a plan to deliver the points in the dying seconds of the game.

Their celebration is short-lived, however. Alan informs them that dark horses Connacht are beating Munster comprehensively. Unless there is a late Munster score, Connacht will finish with points advantage and take the trophy.

Watching the closing stages of the game, Eoin whoops as Dylan, playing for Munster, solos a try to tie the points advantage. Connacht and Leinster share the trophy.

After the interpros, Eoin, Rory and Charlie are selected for the national team, with Dylan called as a replacement.

When Will reappears, Eoin is able to probe him for useful details about the origins of

rugby for his school project. But they are still baffled as to why Will has been summoned to the present.

The first Ireland camp is relentless in terms of fitness and training. Expectations are challenged and no one's position is secure, with the coaches scrutinising every aspect of their play.

The opening ceremony of the World Cup is low-key, and Eoin is overwhelmed when he sees himself in his Irish kit.

However reality rears its head when they realise the size of their opponents, the New Zealand Baby Blacks, and Eoin must break the spell of intimidation that some of the team have fallen into.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p70:** Ted makes a jaundiced remark about how the Leinster board expects success from every match. Is this reasonable? How does this attitude affect the game and the development of the sport?
- **Read p80:** Ted has come under pressure to include Marcus McCord in the game despite his limited abilities as a player. Is it reasonable that the sponsors should have an influence over the lineup just because they donate financially? What would you advise Ted to do?
- **Read p104:** The Ireland coach is determined to test both fitness and skill to help him make his selection. Which is the more important, skill or fitness? Can one compensate for the lack of the other?
- **Read p111:** Eoin is smarting over the coach's remark, and his performance dips. Can negative feelings impact on performance? Can they act as a motivation, or just another challenge to overcome? How can you control negative feelings and channel positive feelings to improve your performance?

ACTIVITIES

1. William Webb Ellis (read p65)

Will recalls adapting the game of Bigside, which ensured his fame as the creator of rugby. At the time, his teacher disapproved and sent a formal, pompous report to the headmaster accusing Will of bringing the Rugby School into disrepute.

Create a copy of the report using the style and language that you think the teacher might have used.

2. Concussion (read p67)

Concussion injuries can be very serious. The IRFU decides to prepare an information sheet for parents explaining what concussion is, how it is caused, why it is serious, what symptoms they should look for, and how to deal with it.

Research the issue and help them prepare the leaflet in a brief and reassuring way.

www.irishrugby.ie/downloads/IRFU-Guide-to-Concussion.pdf

www.irishrugby.ie/downloads/IRFU-Concussion_Poster.pdf

www.irishrugby.ie/concussion

3. Superstition (read p79)

Eoin has a pre-match routine that he always tries to follow; but sometimes a routine can become a superstition.

Can you explain what the difference is between a routine and a superstition?

Working in small groups, create a list of five superstitions and five routines that show the difference between them.

4. Munster's Gift (read pp87–88)

After Dylan's last-minute try gifts the competition to Leinster, Eoin and Dylan's hometown paper, *The Ormondstown Oracle*, prints an article about the tournament and the fortunes of the two Ormondstown players.

The reporter teases Dylan, calling him the 'extra Leinster player' and explaining how the points were applied.

Write the 200-word tournament report. Make sure to choose a humorous headline for the piece.

5. Wow (read p91)

It has been a tremendous day for Eoin. Events seem unreal as he realises the honour of playing for the U-16 Irish team.

That evening when he is alone, he tries to order his thoughts as he completes his diary entry for the day.

Create a copy of his entry.

6. Ireland U-16 (read p117)

The U-16 division is a new enterprise for the IRFU, and they need a fresh design for the team logo for the World Cup.

Create a design and logo to promote and advertise both the IRFU and the competition.

Include illustrations of what you think some of the merchandising (jerseys, mugs, boots, bags) might look like with this new logo.

7. Eoin (read p120)

Just before he leaves the dressing room, Eoin finds a note tucked into his shorts.

Unfolding it, he discovers that it is from his granddad Dixie, wishing him well and telling him how he feels about Eoin's achievement.

Create a copy of the note that Dixie left.

Section 3 William Webb Ellis Pages 123–200

SUMMARY

The game against the Baby Blacks opens with a professional foul. Eoin replies with a try that subdues his opponents' arrogance before the game settles into an exhausting physical contest.

When Eoin is stretchered off late in the game after scoring a try, his replacement is unable to convert, and Ireland concede the game by a single point.

At the hospital, while Eoin is being checked for concussion, Alan eases the gloom by pointing out that Ireland can still reach the semi-finals if they win the best-loser slot. Since there is only a single-point difference, a good win in the next match should see them through. The news breaks that the William Webb Ellis trophy has been stolen from the tournament display.

Cleared with only a short lay-off, Eoin borrows a bike to maintain his fitness. He discovers that the route the ambulance used to take him to hospital is suspiciously indirect.

Eoin confides to Alan that he thinks the appearance of the ghost of William Webb Ellis and the theft of the trophy that bears his name are connected. That evening Will appears again and implores Eoin to help him recover the trophy.

Eoin's suspicions are confirmed when Jarleth checks the distance to the hospital on his phone's GPS and discovers that the ambulance driver took a much longer route than he should have.

A distracted Eoin listens to Alan present the permutations that will allow Ireland to qualify, when a chance remark reveals how the trophy was removed from the ground. Immediately Eoin informs the Gardaí of his theory.

A last-minute try by the South African Baby Boks changes the points advantage and leaves the Scots devastated. Ireland prepare to face Australia in the semis.

Exasperated at the uncanny anticipation from the Aussies, Eoin realises that Charlie Johnston – a former Castlerock player, now a Wallaby – has shared all their plays, forcing Eoin to improvise until a draw at full time.

New rules dictate that Eoin must face his opposite number in a five-goal shoot-out. The Wallaby's consistency deserts him on the last kick, and Ireland claim one of the final slots.

Dixie inadvertently adds another piece to the robbery puzzle, and when Eoin reports it, they are both questioned.

After midnight Will wakens Eoin, insisting that he follow him. He has located the thieves and needs Eoin's help.

The Gardaí are quick to respond, but they hold Eoin incommunicado until the operation is complete and the trophy is recovered, causing him to miss his place in the starting XV.

His replacement has a nightmare first half, so Eoin is allowed to come on for the second.

Determined, he punishes the Kiwi ill-discipline with penalties, seizing a three-point advantage that Ireland manage to hold until the final whistle, when they are submerged under a jubilant swarm of supporters.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p123:** Roger is injured by a deliberate foul that was intended to intimidate both him and the Ireland team. Eoin is disgusted by what he witnesses. Is there a place for this type of 'gamesmanship' in sport? Will there always be people who try to cheat? Can cheating ever be removed from sport if teams are always expected to win?
- **Read p144:** William Webb Ellis has been learning about the role and influence of the media. Does the media help to shape what we think? Is it always balanced in its views? How can you recognise a biased view in the media, and how should you treat it?
- **Read p161:** Dylan observes that the result of the final will either make them celebrities or return them to obscurity. What does celebrity status bring to a person? What are the advantages and disadvantages to being a celebrity? What type of person would wish to be a celebrity and why?
- **Read p166:** Charlie now lives in Australia and is part of their team, but he also has vital information on the Irish plays. Is he right to share this to Australia's advantage? Where do you think his loyalties should have been?

ACTIVITIES

1. Citing (read p123)

Roger has been injured by a foul that the referee ignores.

Neil, the Irish coach, is angry and decides to make a formal complaint, citing both the referee and the Kiwi player.

This is a formal document and needs to be worded carefully, each word chosen with precision to give the facts. It should also be short.

Help Neil to write it.

2. Combinations (read pp124–126)

The scoreboard records a 19–13 advantage to the Kiwis before Eoin crashes over to make it 19–18 on the whistle.

In the match report released afterwards, only the final score is mentioned.

List all of the different combinations that could have led to this final score being achieved.

3. Match report (read pp124–127)

RTÉ Radio is planning a report on this thrilling match for their evening bulletin. In small groups, help to create this match report.

You will need a short commentary describing the highlights of the match. You can also include a brief discussion with two or three studio 'experts', who give their opinions on the tactics and analyse the teams.

If you have the technology, record the piece as a podcast.

4. Fáilte (read p142)

The U-16 Rugby World Cup has attracted players from across the globe to Ireland.

The IRFU has asked Fáilte Ireland to prepare a two-fold leaflet for the participants to welcome them to Ireland.

Work in pairs to create a draft of the leaflet you think they should be given. What information should be included?

www.failteireland.ie

www.discoverireland.ie

5. Q&A (read p170)

Eoin is interviewed immediately after the match. Later, he is so excited that he can't remember what he was asked or how he replied.

In pairs, record the interview he might have

given. Prepare six questions and answers, and then record or perform the interview for the rest of the class.

6. Arrested (read p187)

When the armed Gardaí storm the garage, Eoin is unable to see what is happening.

Ger Siggins, the author, was unsure whether to include a description of this violent incident.

Write a short paragraph describing what happened between the Gardaí entering the garage and the thieves being led out in handcuffs. Did they surrender meekly?

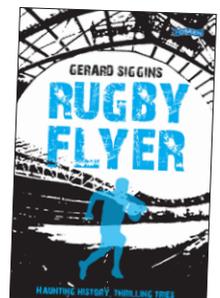
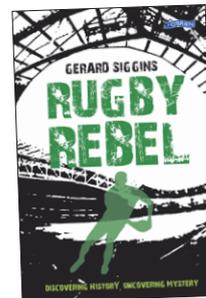
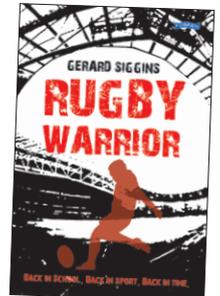
7. Ireland 2017 (read p200)

As William Webb Ellis fades slowly from modern-day Ireland, returning to his own time, he carries memories and impressions of what he has seen, the people he has met and the things he has learned.

There were five things that created particularly powerful memories for him.

Describe what these were and describe the effect they had on him.

Have you read all the other books in the Eoin Madden rugby series?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gerard Siggins was born in Dublin in 1962. Initially a sports journalist, he worked for many years in the *Sunday Tribune*, where he became assistant editor. He has written several books about cricket and rugby and regularly visits schools to talk about his books. For more information about Ger and his books, see www.obrien.ie.