



Theme 5

The Birth of Rugby League

Pupil Resource Sheet 3a

What Happened Next

After the Rugby Football Union had won the vote to ban broken time payments, they made the rules stricter.

They even said that if a club or player was accused of paying a player they were guilty unless they could prove they were innocent. By the end of 1894 they had suspended four clubs in the north for paying players.

The big clubs from Yorkshire and Lancashire told the Rugby Union that the rules were not fair. The Rugby Union would not change the rules.

On 29 August 1895, 12 clubs from Yorkshire and eight clubs from Lancashire met at the George Hotel, Huddersfield. They started a new union called the 'Northern Rugby Football Union'. Huddersfield was one of these clubs.

This split these northern clubs from the Rugby Union and was the birth of rugby league. The name 'Northern Union' was changed to 'Rugby League' in 1922.

This new union's first decision was to allow broken time pay of 6 shillings (30p) per day, close to the average wage.

The Northern Union allowed players to be paid for playing (professionals) in 1898. They also changed some of the rules to make the game faster and more exciting.

The Northern Union had a league of 22 clubs in 1895. The Rugby Football Union banned matches against Northern Union clubs. More and more northern clubs changed from rugby union to Northern Union because they had hardly any local rugby union teams left to play. By 1898 there were 98 Northern Union clubs.

The very small Northern Union clubs found it hard to raise the money for broken time payments. Some went bankrupt and most became amateur.

The Rugby Football Union allowed players to be paid in 1995, one hundred years after the game split in two and saw the birth of rugby league.