

Jodie Cunningham

Rugby League Player

Small Organisation Winner
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NORTHERN POWER WOMEN
PODCAST

HOW TO MAKE SPORTS MORE INCLUSIVE



How Jodie Got Into Rugby?

"I'll give it a go. And then I instantly fell in love. I did so many different sports and everything else fell away at that point. I just wanted to commit all my time to Rugby League. We went on and we won that competition four times on the run and I just wanted to play as much Rugby League as I could so that was it. My dad and Emily's dad actually created the Warrington Girls team. We created our own club side and we ended up being champions at national level from a club perspective as well. Our parents now are best friends as well as us still being best friends which is which is pretty special. So me and Emily have been through this journey all through schools girls rugby right through to open age playing for England together."

Why it is important to be a positive role model?

"I want to make sure that I am the best role model that I can be. When I was younger, I couldn't name a women's player. So I didn't even know there was an England team. When I started playing. I just tried this sport, loved it. I'd never seen women or girls playing it. So it never even come on to my radar that that was an option. And then a coach said to me and Emily: 'You two stick at it. I think he could play for England one day.' And as soon as he said that, it was like a penny drop moment of, Wow, I can represent my country in this sport. How do I do that? How do we get there? There was no visibility of it. Whereas hopefully now we provide that visibility so that young girls don't need to be told that it's an option, they can see it already."

National Women and Girls Development Manager for the RFL

"I feel the pressure of it. I think, because I care so much. I suppose I'm very fortunate, everyone says, If you do a job you love, you'll never work a day in your life, which is true. But I think when you love what you do as much as I do, and are so heavily invested in it, it's also hard because it's not just a job, you care so much in the outcome. And you're so invested in the outcome that I don't think you have an off button with it. And I certainly don't. I think my role is about helping, supporting change, putting programmes in place that take some of the barriers down for women and girls participating in Rugby League."

How Jodie Inspired Others

"I remember doing a presentation (2018) at the end of that season. It was for my old club for the girls section and a parent came up to me afterwards thanking me. And I was like I've not really done anything. He said: 'No, you've made me not have to lie to my daughter anymore. She has said for years when we sat in the stands at St. Helens. Dad I am going to play for St's one day and that was never possible. I'd sort of pamper to her because I didn't want to break a little heart. I don't have to lie anymore. She can wear that kit, she can play in that stadium, and she can represent the club that she loves.' And that was the power of what the Women's Super League brought."