



Leading Edge is immensely proud to be supporting England Rugby's next generation of players with a series of challenging off-field development events.

Understanding England Rugby's development challenge

England Rugby's Player Pathway is about developing the future stars of the game, and throughout 2017, there has been a focus on off-the-pitch experiences to grow the players' self-awareness, communication and leadership skills.

Dean Ryan is Head of International Player Development at the RFU, and Leading Edge was approached to work with Dean to design, create and co-ordinate unique off-field activities to support the players' development by taking them out of their comfort zones to learn how to get the best out of each other.

Partnering for success

Talking about the type of partner that would help build the required characteristics for England's next generation, Dean said:

"We wanted a partner who could bring a wealth of experience from business – to stretch our thinking – and Leading Edge has certainly delivered on that."

Using expertise from global business and leadership programmes, Leading Edge's approach was to design activities as part of a framework to deliver valuable life-learning experiences for the players that raise awareness of themselves and challenge them to work with different personalities while learning new skills.

Central to these off-the-pitch events was the importance of building an environment where the players would have the opportunity to get things wrong, self-reflect and then build skills around how they would do things differently a second time.



Hear Patrick Marr of Leading Edge talk about character development with England Rugby's next generation



Watch the England Rugby video

Read on for more about England Rugby's journey...

Having an impact

So far, Leading Edge has designed, developed and co-ordinated three unique activities to have a meaningful impact on the players' development.

First, the players spent time with emergency search and rescue organisation Serve On in Salisbury. The group were put in various 'emergency' scenarios and had to work together and communicate effectively to successfully take on physically demanding challenges, such as



rescuing people from tunnels and fragile buildings. To prepare the players for this, Leading Edge Team Coaches used Insights Discovery to explore their personality types and preferences, and understand how these preferences can affect how people co-operate with each other in different scenarios.

A 'Big Brother' style house was the setting for the second character-building experience. Living as a group, players took on tasks to



develop their capability to support and challenge as well as give feedback. Saracens forward Ben Earl, who was also part of England's World Rugby U20 Championship squad in the summer, said:

"We worked with actors in certain situations dealing with different colour types and how to put that into practice, which was really challenging for most of the group. It put all our learning to the test."

"It's all about developing as an individual and building those off-pitch relationships so that you work hard for each other on it. You can only do that by understanding how others operate. When you are in those tough moments on the pitch, whether you are a try down or a man down, you need to be able to co-operate, communicate and work under pressure."

Ben Earl, Saracens forward and England Rugby U20 squad member

The third activity – at Thomas Becket School in Northampton – saw the players putting everything together in a real environment to help others. Working in smaller groups, they stepped out of their comfort zones to lead and deliver three projects:



refurbishing the Sixth Form to create an inspirational area; designing and creating a mural for the front of the building, and producing a promotional video highlighting the school's core values of faith, justice, compassion, truth and respect.

All three unique activities provided opportunities for the players to grow as individuals, build on lessons learnt, and experience – in a different context – how working hard for each other brings success.

Making a difference

Leading Edge supported England Rugby to give selected players character-building experiences off the pitch that will benefit them both on and off it in their future careers and lives

Players learnt a huge amount from the activities, which were all designed to build their awareness and understanding of how each other operates so that they can challenge, support and get the best out of each other on the pitch

The success of these development events and the positive impact of Leading Edge's involvement have already been recognised and a 2018 series is now underway



See how the players are getting on in 2018

"In elite sport, you have to continuously and quickly adapt to what is happening around you. Similarly, we need our learning partner to be able to show an exceptional level of flexibility, and Leading Edge never disappoints."

Dean Ryan, Head of International Player Development, RFU

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