

BBC London's Ian Ramsdale considers the growing links between League and Union



When I found out that Henry Paul was to sign for Leeds next season, I thought the Rhinos had pulled off the scoop of the season. Seriously. Then I realised he was switching codes. Again.

We've seen players go one way or the other. Some have even gone back. But in the modern (or 'Paul') era, a third professional switch is rare, if not unique.

For two sports who, if left together in a room, would have more unnecessary arguments than reality TV contestants, it is moves like this that bring them closer together.

We don't see masses of players switching codes currently, but the men on the pitch make up only a small percentage of rugby's overall business.

Both Harlequins and Leeds have built on hosting a league and union entity under one badge, using the same pitch, facilities, and some expertise. As rugby league enters its franchise stage, surely there'll be more partnerships and amalgamations to come? It seems to make sense.

Clubs in all sports do things like sharing grounds. It's one of the simplest forms of a sporting relationship, but the two sides here in today's Challenge Cup draw are a

new breed of operation. And who'd have thought it would work so well, because no matter what we're told about the 'other' code, you always have your favourite.

They are two completely separate sports with their own organisational pyramids from governing body down to players and fans. But one of the groups that is currently free to switch codes whenever they like, even on a week-to-week basis, is the supporters.

I'm not suggesting anyone should desert the league game for the other one (nor vice versa). Neither sport needs or wants that, but I think there's more to come from inter-code partnerships.

When will aspects of the base start to feed back up the pyramid? The day that a player can easily switch codes but stay at the same club can't be too far away, can it?

Taking it further, how about dual-code contracts; a player signing to a club name, rather than a discipline? Leeds Rugby's union and league sides have already experimented with this system but, with the seasons as they are, it could mean playing all year round – a big ask.

Since rugby split into its respective halves, the two games have evolved into the state they're in today. They're probably now more separate than they've ever been, but in some ways they'll always be ever so close.

I'll be archiving this article, so it can be dusted off on the day any of these ideas are regularly put into

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practice. But it's unlikely to be in the foreseeable future.

Rammo

