

RUGBY... just the basics

Five fundamentals to successful rugby: (1) obtain and maintain *possession* of the ball; (2) *go forward*, don't run toward the sideline, (3) *support* the ball carrier, (4) maintain *continuity* by keeping the ball available, (5) maintain constant *pressure* on the opposition.

Players: 15 on each side - 8 forwards and 7 backs. The primary task of the backs is to advance the ball through running, passing, and kicking. The primary task of the forwards is to pursue the ball around the field and gain and maintain possession of the ball for the team. Substitution of players is limited to replacing injured players plus up to 3 non-injury subs; but no more than 6 total subs in a game. If a player leaves the field and is replaced by a substitute, the player who left may not return to the game. There is one exception to this - a player may leave the field and be replaced for up to 10 minutes to have an open or bleeding wound treated. The player may then return, replacing the substitute, if the wound is covered and no longer bleeding.

The Game: Two halves (up to 40 minutes each), with a 5 minute half-time.

Each half begins with a drop kick from mid-field. The rugby kickoff is usually short and high. The kicking team may play the ball once it has traveled 10 meters.

The ball is advanced down the field by running or kicking. The ball may be passed to supporting players as long as the ball does not travel forward. The ball carrier on the team in possession sets the offside line for that team. Any teammate ahead of the ball carrier is offside, although the referee will usually not assess a penalty unless the offside player interferes with play (either by playing the ball or by interfering with a defender). If the ball is kicked, only the kicker or those teammates who were onside (behind the kicker) at the time of the kick may advance toward the ball or an opponent who has caught the ball. Players who were ahead of the kicker at the time of the kick must retreat until the kicker or another onside player runs past them, thereby putting them onside.

Only the player carrying the ball may be tackled. No blocking or obstruction of a player not in possession of the ball is permitted. Tackles must be made by the defender wrapping his/her arms around the ball carrier below the ball carrier's shoulders (preferably below the waist!). Cross-body blocks, high tackles, or tripping are all considered dangerous and are penalties. Once a ball carrier has been tackled, he/she must play the ball (pass it or place it on the ground) within about two seconds. The defender who made the tackle must release the tackled player at once. Nearby players may pick the ball up only if they are on their feet and if the ball is loose. Players on the ground may not play the ball.

A **RUCK** is formed when the ball is on the ground and there are players from both teams bound to one another over the ball. Players may not pick up the ball in a ruck, but they may try to free the ball by pushing the ruck toward the opponent's goal line. They may also use their feet to get the ball out of the ruck. Players joining a ruck must join from behind the rear-most player on their own team. Players joining from the side or from the opponent's side will be penalized for being offside. If the ball is trapped in a ruck for more than several seconds, the referee will stop play and award a scrum to the team that last carried the ball.

A **MAUL** forms if a ball carrier is stopped by an opponent, but remains on his/her feet, and at least one supporting player is bound. As in a ruck, players may join the maul only from behind the rear-most player on their own team. In many cases, the ball will be forced to the ground, at which time the maul becomes a ruck. If this occurs, the ball must be played immediately or it will be a turnover. If the ball is trapped in a maul for more than five seconds and the maul has

ceased to move forward, the referee will stop play and award a scrum to the team that stopped the ball carrier.

If the ball is passed forward, or accidentally bounces forward off of a player's hands (a knock-on), the opposing team is awarded a scrum at the point of the infraction. The eight forwards of each team pack together and meet the opposing pack of forwards over the spot indicated by the referee. Each team's scrum usually consists of three forwards across the front row, four across the second row, and one at the rear of the scrum. The front rows of the two opposing teams form a tunnel. The ball is placed into that tunnel by the scrum-half of the team that now has possession. The forward in the middle of the front row tries to deflect the ball backward into his/her pack, and the two packs try to drive one another back until the ball leaves the scrum. The ball may not be played with the hands while it is in the scrum, but may be picked up as soon as it leaves the scrum. Usually the ball is picked up by the scrum-half of the winning team, who passes the ball to the backs.

If the ball goes into touch (out-of-bounds), it is brought back into play with a line-out. If the ball is carried out, the line-out takes place at the spot where the ball carrier stepped on or crossed the touch line (side line). If the ball is kicked out along the ground, the line-out occurs where the ball crossed the touch line. If the ball is kicked out in the air, the line out occurs at a point even with the place where the kick was taken, unless the ball was kicked from behind the 22 meter line. In this case the line-out occurs wherever the ball crosses the touch line. In most cases, carrying or kicking the ball into touch results in a loss of possession. The one exception is in the case of a penalty kick, when the team awarded the kick may kick the ball into touch and still retain possession.

To form a line-out, forwards from both teams form two parallel lines about two meters apart and perpendicular to the touch line (side line). The team throwing the ball in sets the number of players in the line; the opposing team may not exceed this number. The ball is thrown between the two lines of forwards by a player from the team now in possession. Opposing forwards jump for the ball and try to gain possession. The ball is then played to the backs of the team that won the line-out, and they advance the ball downfield.

Penalizing Infractions: Serious infractions (dangerous play or significant interference with the flow of the game) will result in the referee assessing a penalty to the offending side. If the penalty occurs rather deep in the opponent's defensive end, the team awarded the penalty may elect to kick for points (see Scoring). If a penalty occurs far from the goal posts, the team awarded the penalty kick may elect to "kick for touch" - a punt downfield and out of bounds, followed by a line-out where the ball left the field. Infractions not serious enough to result in a penalty may result in a change of possession followed by a free kick. A team may not score points directly from a free kick. The free kick may be a punt downfield to gain territory, or a short kick or tap with the foot followed by playing the ball by running or passing. Many teams will run a set play from a free kick. If a free kick is punted downfield and goes into touch (out-of-bounds), the team that kicked the ball out loses possession for the ensuing line-out. A team awarded a free kick can elect to take a scrum at the point of the infraction.

Scoring: If the ball is touched down in the goal area by the attacking team, a try is awarded (5 points). The ball must be touched to the ground - merely carrying the ball into the goal area does not score any points. If a try is awarded, the team that just scored will attempt a conversion by trying to kick the ball through the goal posts (2 points). The conversion is a place kick taken from a point along a line straight out from the point at which the ball was touched down to score the try. Therefore, tries scored in the middle of the field result in easier conversion kicks than those scored in the corners of the field. Please note that even if the opposition is likely to score a

try, defenders should continue to pursue to try to force the try to be scored close to a corner, making the conversion kick more difficult. Failure to pursue will result in a try near the goal posts, making a successful conversion kick more likely.

Other means of scoring include drop goals and penalty kicks, each worth 3 points if they clear the goal posts. A drop goal is a drop kick through the goal posts and may occur at any time during play. Penalty kicks are awarded for serious infractions (such as dangerous play or offsides), and must be taken at the point of the infraction. A penalty kick for points must be a place kick, and the kicking team must indicate to the referee their intent to kick for points.

After a score, the team that just scored receives the ball. The kick from the team that was just scored against occurs at mid-field and must be a drop kick.

In-goal play that does not result in a score: If the ball is brought into the goal area by the defending team and touched down by the defending team, a scrum is awarded to the attacking team 5 meters out from the goal line. If the attacking team kicks the ball into the goal area and the ball is downed by the defending team, or if the ball is kicked through the goal area and out of bounds by the attacking team, the defending team gets possession and must drop kick the ball from the 22 meter line.

Officials: There is one referee, who keeps time, score, and calls all infractions. Only the captain of each team may address the referee during the match. The referee is assisted by two touch judges who call when the ball goes into touch (out of bounds). If the ball, or a player carrying the ball touches the side line, the ball is considered "in touch" (out of bounds).