

Rugby for Beginners

Introduction

Rugby Union is a sport played by two teams of fifteen players and six substitutes controlled by a referee and two touch judges. It is played in two 40 halves on a grass pitch. This article is aimed at giving a very basic introduction to the game of Rugby Union. All photos are courtesy of Getty Images.

Scoring



The idea of the game is to outscore your opponents by being the first player to ground the ball behind the oppositions try line. This is called a “try” and is worth five points. To ground the ball an attacker must either hold the ball and touch it on the ground, touch the ball with downward pressure whilst it is in the in-goal area or fall on the ball and push down so that it is under their body and over the try line.

A “Conversion” may then be attempted by place kicking the ball over the cross bar and between the posts from a position perpendicular to where the ball was grounded for the try. Three Points may also be scored by drop kicking the ball over the bar and between the posts or place kicking a Penalty over the bar between the posts for three points.



Playing

Players line up either as a forward or a back. Forwards are the players who take part in the scrums and line outs, backs can be seen lined up when the ball is passed along the line.

Although their motion will generally be forward, players cannot pass the ball forward, i.e. towards the oppositions try line. Referees will stop the play if the ball is passed forward and award a scrum (Unless there is an advantage – see advantage section. A scrum will also be called if a knock on occurs with the “head” (see the scrum section) going to the non-penalised team. A knock on is where a player loses control of the ball and propels it forward with their hands or arms into another player or into the ground. If it is propelled forward and the player retains control without hitting the ground or another player, then it is play on. There is however an exception to this rule, if a kick is charged down, the knock on rule is not applied.

The Scrum

A scrum consists of eight players from each side who bind on to each other and try to push the other team backwards and off the ball, players cannot push before the ball is in the scrum this will result in a penalty.

Players must remain bound until the ball comes out however if the ball is at the feet of the hindmost player, they may unbind, pick the ball up and continue playing. The only time fewer than 8 members of the team are in the scrum is if a second row or flanker has been sin-binned, sent off or left the field due to injury and no replacement is available.



The eight players in the scrum are 2 x Props, 1 x Hooker, 2 x Second Rows and 3 x flankers. The props and hooker comprise the front row. This is a specialist area of the game and only players suitably trained in the prop and hooker positions may play in the front row. If injuries or disciplinary matters dictate that there is insufficient cover for the front row, uncontested scrums

are played. In an uncontested scrum, the forwards do not push or compete and the team that put the ball in must win it.

The scrum is formed by the hooker putting an arm around either prop, the two second rows then places their heads into the spaces between the hooker's hips and the props hips. The flankers then bind on to the second rows with one flanker on the side of the scrum that has most open field, one on the side with least field and one in the middle – the number 8. The props also have a specific side of the scrum to bind on to. The loosehead prop binds on the side of the scrum that the ball is put in from (hence there is space on one side of his head!) and the tighthead prop binds on the other side of the hooker. As the front rows interlock heads when the scrum is formed, a tighthead prop will always scrummage against a loosehead prop and vice versa.

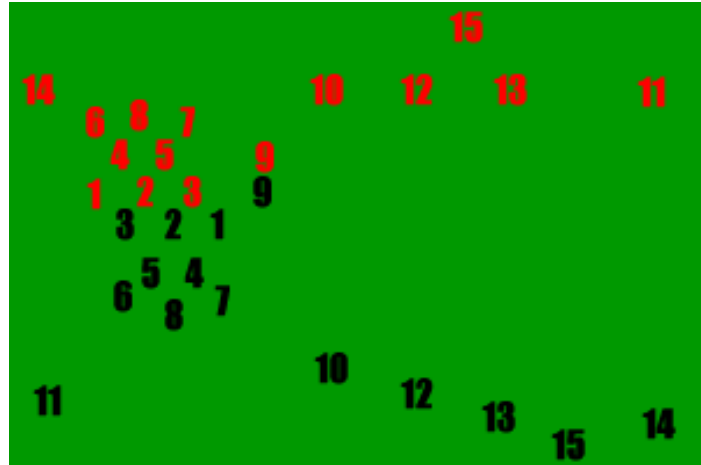
The scrum half of the team that have the “head” – so called because the loosehead is nearer the scrum half puts the ball in straight in the channel between the two front rows. The ball must come back out of the scrum via any route, as long as it passes through the legs of a prop. Once the ball is out of the scrum, play carries on as normal.

Positions

Players line up for a game in various positions the shirt numbers that a player relates to this position. The standard line up is:

- 15 – Full Back
- 14 – (Right) Wing
- 13 – Outside Centre
- 12 – Inside Centre

- 11 – (Left) Wing
- 10 – Fly Half
- 9 – Scrum Half
- 1 – Loosehead Prop
- 2 – Hooker
- 3 – Tighthead Prop
- 4 – Second Row (Lock)
- 5- Second Row (Lock)
- 6- Blindside Flanker
- 7- Openside Flanker
- 8 – Number Eight (Flanker)



The positional line up at a scrum can be seen on the right. This is a typical line up with the black team attacking “up the page”. The red team is defending. Notice how the black team are in a line which will allow the ball to be passed backwards and the red team are in a defensive line, behind the last player in the scrum.

The Tackle

A tackle is completed when the ball carrier is held and brought to the ground by the tackler. If a player is merely knocked over then they are not considered to be tackled and they may get back up and continue playing. If a tackle is made above the shoulder, or if a player does not make an attempt to wrap their arms around the player (i.e. shoulder charging) then the tackler will be penalised and may face a spell in the sin-bin. If it considered to be dangerous.

When a player is tackled they must release the ball immediately. Holding onto it will result in a penalty to the opposition. The tackler along with any other player coming into the tackle area must be on their feet before playing at the ball and enter it from the rear of tackle. If any player enters the tackle area and does not remain on their feet they may be penalised by the referee.

After a tackle there are two scenarios that can occur. A ruck occurs when the ball is on the floor and there is at least one player from each team in contact with each other over the ball. The ball cannot be handled in a ruck, instead the ball must be rucked backwards by players using their feet. Players must join a ruck from behind the hindmost foot of the hindmost player otherwise they will be offside and penalised.



A maul is formed when there are three players, all on their feet; the ball carrier and one person from each team. Players must also join a maul from behind the hindmost foot or

be offside. A player must bind onto a ruck or maul using their whole arm, placing a hand on the ruck or maul is not sufficient and may be penalised.

The Penalty

If a team are awarded a penalty they may select, to kick to ball to touch to gain field position and hopefully possession from a line out, to kick for goal for a three point score, tap the ball and run or, depending on field position or offence, take a scrum. Some minor offences result in a free kick from which a penalty kick at goal cannot be taken.

The Line Out

If the ball is kicked into touch from the field of play a line out is awarded. The throw will only go to the team that kicked it if it is from a penalty kick. All other circumstances result in the non-kicking team getting the throw in. The throw in should be reasonable straight into the line out. The team throwing in will determine how many players are in the line out. Penalties occur at a line out when a player unfairly interferes with his opposite number.

General Offside

In general play a player is off side when in front of a team mate who has the ball, this means that the player is out of the game until they are put back on side. They must not take part in the game in anyway during this time.

If a player kicks ahead and a team mate is offside at the moment of the kick, they can be put on side by the kicker if the kicker runs in front of them or if another on side team mate runs in front of him. They can also be put onside by an opponent if the opponent runs for 5m with the ball, kicks or passes the ball or intentionally touches it but does not hold it – such as dropping the kick.

There is an offside line at the hindmost foot of the scrum, ruck and maul beyond which defending players cannot move until the ball is out. The offside line at a line out is 10m from the line of touch so that the players have more room to move.

Advantage

If a team commits either a penalty or scrum offence the opposition can be awarded an advantage without the need for a penalty or scrum to be awarded. Assuming the opposition get the ball there are two types of advantage, territorial where a player has taken the opportunity to move the ball upfield and tactical advantage where the player sets up a good attacking platform for their team.

If a referee decides that an advantage has been taken they will allow play on and ignore the need for a scrum or penalty. If they decide otherwise, the play is brought back to the original offence position and the scrum or penalty is awarded.

Further Reading

This is a very basic over view of the game of Rugby Union. If you wish to learn more about the game, the laws of the game are available [here](#) on the IRB website. The RFU have a specialist [coaching section](#) of their website with many interesting areas of player development and coaching advice available.