

RUGBY

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE GAME

Rugby is played at a fast pace, with few stoppages and continuous possession changes. All players on the field, regardless of position, must be able to run, pass, kick and catch the ball. Likewise, all players must also be able to tackle and defend, making each position both offensive and defensive in nature. There is no blocking of the opponents like in football. A rugby match consists of two 40-minute halves.

FIELD OF PLAY

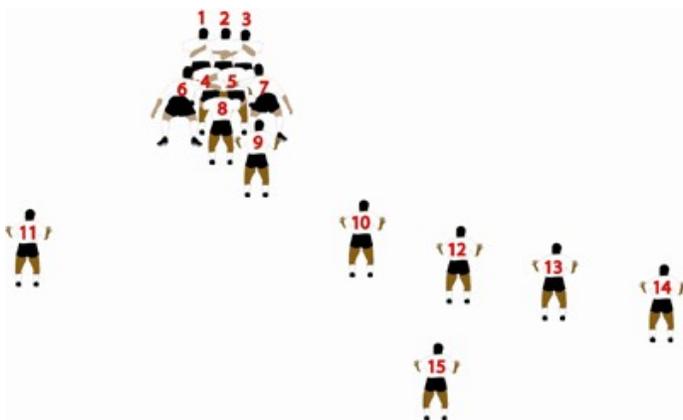
Rugby is played on a field, called a pitch, that is longer and wider than a football field, more like a soccer field. A typical pitch is 100 meters (110 yards) long 70 meters (75 yards) wide. Additionally, there are 10-22 meter end zones, called the in-goal area, behind the goalposts. The goalposts are 'H'-shaped cross bars located on the goal line and are the same size as American football goalposts.

THE BALL

The rugby ball is made of leather or other similar synthetic material that is easy to grip and does not have laces. Rugby balls are made in varying sizes (3, 4 or 5) for both youth and adult players. Like footballs, rugby balls are oval in shape, however are rounder and less pointed than footballs to minimize the erratic bounces we see in football.

PLAYERS & POSITIONS

A rugby team has 15 players on the field of play, both American football and



soccer have 11 players on each team. In rugby, each team is numbered the exact same way. The number of each player signifies that player's position. Players numbered 1-8 are forwards, who are typically the larger, stronger players of the team whose main job is to win possession of the ball. These players are similar in size and abilities as American football linebackers and lineman. Players numbered 9-15 are backs, who tend to be the smaller, faster and more agile players. Their main role is to exploit possession of the ball that is won by the forwards, similar to the roles of American football's running backs, wide receivers and quarterbacks.

STARTING THE GAME

Just like in American football, rugby is started with a kickoff to the opponent from mid-field. Provided that the ball travels beyond the 10 meter line, any player of either team may gain possession of the ball.

SCORING

There are four ways for a team to score points:

Try: Five points are awarded to a team for touching the ball down in the other team's in-goal area. This is much like a touchdown in American football.

Conversion: Following a try, two points are awarded for a successful kick through the goal posts. The attempt is taken on a line, at least 10 meters, straight out from the point where the ball was touched down.

Penalty Kick: Following a major law violation, the kicking team, if in range, has the option to "kick for points." Three points are awarded for a successful penalty kick. The kick must be from the point of the foul or anywhere on a line straight behind that point. The ball can be played if the kick fails.

Drop Goal: Three points are awarded for a successful drop kick. A drop kick may be taken from anywhere on the field at any time during play. A drop goal is similar to a field goal in football, however, in rugby the kick is made during the course of normal play. The ball is alive if the kick fails.

MOVING THE BALL

There are three ways to move the ball:

Running: When running the ball, players may continue to run until they are tackled, step out of bounds or run beyond the goal line (see scoring a try). Players run the ball to advance toward the opponent's goal line.

Passing: The ball may be passed to any other player. However, it may only be passed laterally or backward, never forward. Players pass the ball to an open teammate to keep it in play and further advance it.

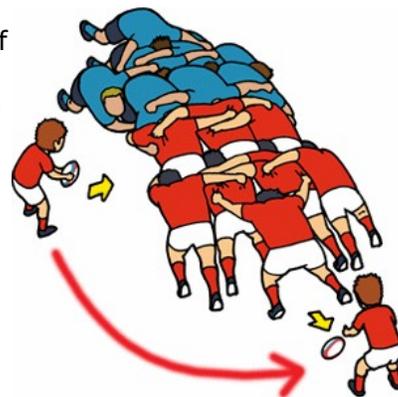
Kicking: Any player may kick the ball forward at any time. Once the ball is kicked, players of either team, regardless of whether or not the ball hits the ground, may gain possession. Players typically kick the ball to a teammate in an effort to advance it or to the opposing team to obtain relief from poor field position.

RESTARTING PLAY

There are two methods of restarting play following a stoppage caused by either the ball going out of bounds or because of an infraction of the laws.

Line-Out: If the ball goes out of bounds, it is restarted with a Line-Out. Both teams form a line perpendicular to the touchline and 1-meter (3 feet) apart from one another. A player of the team not responsible for the ball going out of bounds calls a play and throws the ball in the air in a straight line between the two lines. Players of each team may be supported in the air by their teammates as they jump to gain possession of the ball.

Scrum: Rugby's unique formation, the forerunner of the American football line of scrimmage, is the method used to restart the game after the referee has whistled a minor law violation. A bound group of players from each team form a "tunnel" with the opposition. The non-offending team puts the ball into the tunnel by rolling it into the middle and each team pushes forward until one player is able to hook the ball with the feet and push it to the back row players of his/ her team. The Scrum Half then retrieves the ball and puts it into play.



OFFSIDE LAW

Probably one of the more challenging aspects about rugby for the first time observer is the offside law. Like soccer, the offside line is continually moving up and down the pitch in rugby and varies according to the aspect of play. In general play, the ball creates the offside line and players are not permitted to participate in play if they are on the opposing teams side of the ball. Simply being offside is not a penalty, but attempting to participate in the game from an offside position is. In the lineouts previously discussed, the offside lines are 10 meters back on either side from a line drawn across the field from where the ball is thrown in. At a scrum the offside lines are drawn across the field through the feet of the last person in each team's scrum.

TACKLES, RUCKS AND MAULS

There is *no blocking* in Rugby. Players in possession of and carrying the ball may be stopped by being tackled by the opposing team. Players are **tackled** around the waist and legs and, in general, may not be tackled higher. Once a player is tackled, however, play does not stop. The player must release the ball when tackled to the ground.

A player who is tackled to the ground must try to make the ball available immediately so that play can continue. Supporting players from both teams (one from each team) converge over the ball on the ground, binding with each other and attempt to push the opposing players backwards in a manner similar to a scrum. This situation is known as a **ruck**. The ball may not be picked up by any player, until the ball emerges out of the ruck. The ruck ends and play continues.

A **maul** is formed with a similar gathering of players, except the player in possession of the ball is not brought to the ground (not tackled) but it held up by an opponent and one his/her own players converge on him/her. This creates offside lines through the feet of the last players on each side. Players from each team must retreat behind these offside lines if they are to take part in any subsequent play. The maul ends when the ball emerges.

RUGBY GLOSSARY

Drop kick: A kick made when the player drops the ball and it bounces off the ground prior to being kicked. Worth three points if it travels through the goalposts. Drop kicks are also used to restart play after a score.

Forward pass: A violation that usually results in a scrum to the defending team.

Infringement: A violation of a law.

Knock on: The accidental hitting or dropping of the ball forward. The infringement is the same as that for a forward pass: a scrum to the other team.

Penalties: Penalties occur regularly in rugby. Unlike other sports, there typically aren't yardage penalties and only occasionally do teams have to play short handed. Instead, the non-offending team is usually awarded a choice to kick the ball to gain field advantage. Some of the more important penalties are listed below:

Penalty Kick: Awarded after a serious infringement of the law. Offenders are required to retreat 10 yards while the opposing team is given the opportunity to restart play unopposed. Teams will often kick the ball up field and out of bounds to gain field advantage. When they do this, play is restarted as a lineout where the ball goes out of bounds. If in range, they may attempt a kick at the goal posts, worth three points. Finally, they may simply tap the ball with their foot and run with it.

Free Kick: This is awarded after a less serious infringement of the law. The free kick is similar to the penalty kick except a player cannot attempt a kick at goal to try to score three points. A player must restart with a tap kick or attempt to kick the ball out of bounds. If the kick is made from in front of the 22 meters (25 yards) line and goes directly out of bounds, the lineout occurs back where the kick was first kicked. If the ball bounces out of bounds, or if the kick was taken from behind the 22 meter (25 yards) line the resulting lineout is where the ball crossed the touch line.

Put in: Rolling the ball down the center of the scrum tunnel by the Scrum Half.

Sevens: An abbreviated game of rugby that follows the same laws except a 7's team consists of only seven players and each half is seven minutes long. Much like a game of three-on-three full court basketball, it's a wide-open contest. Because of its wide-open style of play, the Seven's version of rugby is a very entertaining game to watch.

Throw in: Throwing the ball down the middle of a lineout.

Touchline: The side boundary of the field (sideline).

Try line: The end boundary of the field (goal line).

22-Meter line: Is a line 22 meters (25 yards) from the try line. If a kick is made from behind the "22", the opposing team gets a lineout where the ball went out of bounds. If the kick was made in front of the "22", the resulting lineout is from the point of the kick if the ball goes directly out of bounds.

Rules taken and adapted from: http://www.ombac.org/ombac_rugby/rulesofrugby.htm

Pictures taken from :

Rugby pitch: <http://etablissements.ac-amiens.fr/0601178e/quadriphonie/spip.php?article1793>

Team Formation: http://eastvalleyrugby.com/Rugby_Positions.html

Scrum: <http://www.med.teikyo-u.ac.jp/~nozomu/nozomuHP/2006-09/Rugby-scrum.gif>