



The Rugby Case:

A crossover sporting opportunity for High-School football players during the off-season

Rugby: An Introduction

Rugby is a team sport that is played in over 120 countries throughout the world, with over 3 million registered players. A global TV audience of over 4 billion people watched the last Rugby World Cup in France, 2007.

Rugby was 'invented' in 1823, in England, when William Webb Ellis, a student of Rugby School, "with fine disregard for the rules of [soccer] picked up the ball and ran with it". **American Football later emerged from Rugby in the 1880's.**

Source: www.playrugbyusa.com

Two significant differences between Rugby and American Football are the addition of the 'Forward Pass' and the allowance of blocking for the ball carrier. The laws of Rugby allow for each team to contest possession at all stages of a game without a break in play for long periods. The fluid and rapid nature of Rugby means that although teams practice and execute rehearsed plays and defensive schemes, **players must be quick thinking and tactically adept to cope with an unpredictable, fast moving game.**

Source: Wikipedia.org - [Comparison of American Football to Rugby](#)

Rugby is governed and officiated by standardized and strictly enforced laws, maintained and modified to support the principles of the game by the International Rugby Board. While all laws are intended to encourage fair play and eliminate safety risks, **specific law variations are followed at the youth level to further ensure player safety and minimize risk of injury.**

Rugby by the Numbers

- 2016 – The year Rugby will return to the Olympics Games, in Rio de Janeiro
- 1920 & 1924 – The last years Rugby was included as an Olympic sport; the USA won both Gold Medals
- Two High School Leagues in Minnesota - U17 (Junior Varsity) and U19 (Varsity)
- 15 players on the field, per team
- 2x35 minute running-time halves, at the HS level
- Zero forward passing, Zero blocking, Zero stoppage at tackles – play constantly recycles
- **All players run with the ball and tackle, and there's a position for everyone** – Linemen, Linebackers, Defensive Backs, Backfield, Receivers, Tight-Ends, Kickers, Quarterbacks



Difference in Game Flow

Football – One Play every 45 Secs.

Rugby – One Phase every 10 Seconds, Constant Play

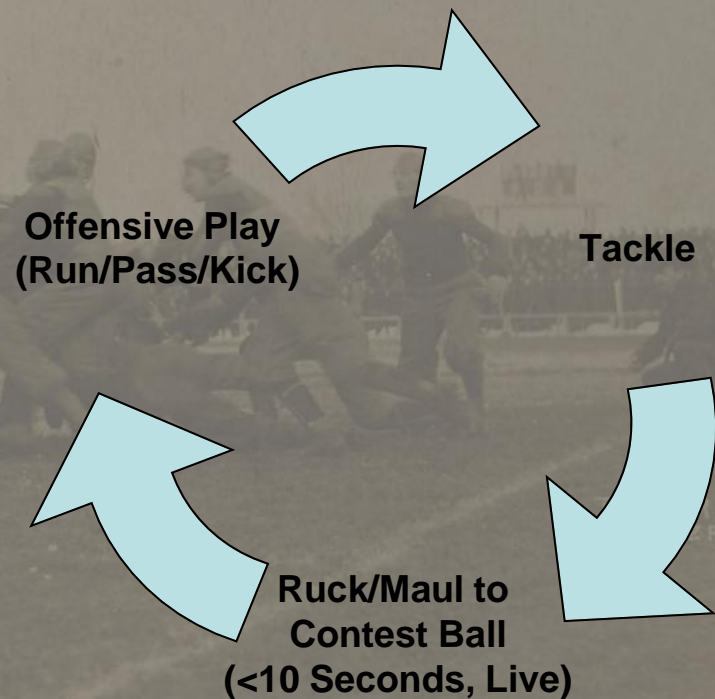
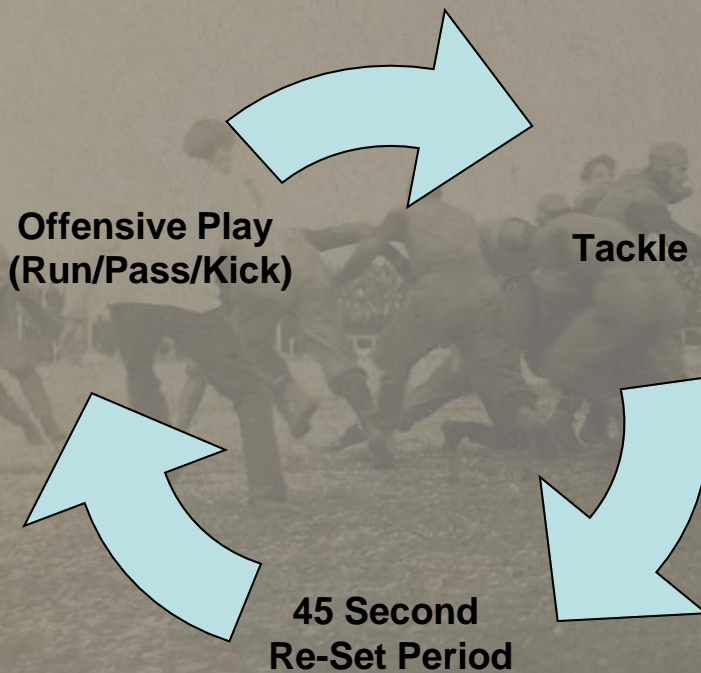


Image Source: [Wikipedia.org - University of Michigan Football vs. Minnesota, 1902](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:University_of_Michigan_Football_vs._Minnesota_1902.jpg)

Common Skills/Attributes

| Football Attributes Which a Rugby Off-season Would Maintain or Improve | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Skill/Attribute | Key Components | Football | Rugby |
| Intensity | Competitiveness; Toughness; “Killer instinct” | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Athleticism | Top Speed, Agility, Strength, Balance | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Tackling | Success rate after contact; Tackle percentage | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Conditioning | Minimize recovery time; Sustain peak work rate for duration of a game | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Gaining Ground | Open-field running; Controlling contact; “Big” players running hard; “Fast” players breaking line | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Ball-handling | Success rate in pass-catch; Ball retention in contact; “Big” guys able to create turnovers | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Teamwork | Game plan execution; On-the-field communication | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Character | Commitment; Team-first attitude; Sportsmanship | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Creativity | Cognition; Creating & capitalizing on reactions | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Rugby Crossover Athletes

- **"There have literally been hundreds of football players who also played rugby as a second sport at Cal and understandably, some have gone on to the NFL..."**

Source: Jack Clark, Head Coach, University of Cal. Berkeley Rugby ([See article by clicking here](#))

- **Utah's Highland Rugby, winners of 19 national High School/U19 Rugby championships has five former players currently in the NFL:**

- Haloti Ngata (Ravens)
- Stewart Bradley (Eagles)
- Marcus Mailei (Eagles)
- Naufahu Tahi (Vikings)
- Fui Vakapuna (Bengals)



- **"How Rugby Makes Better Football Players"**

- Published by Gridiron Coach
- Full document included at right



**Double-Click
Document
to Open**

Perspectives on Rugby

- **Larry Wilson – Coach, Highland Rugby (UT)**

- *19-time National U19 Rugby Champs*

“As a highly successful football coach for over 30 years, at both the high school and university/college level, I encouraged every football player to play rugby in the spring. The carry over value to football, both technical and tactical, is huge. The conditioning far exceeds that which can be accomplished in the football off season.

Our football program at Highland High School was closely aligned with the Highland Rugby program in structure, expectations, discipline and philosophy. The programs worked hand in hand and complemented each other in a way that was a decided and distinctive advantage for both sports. *As a football coach, we never lost a player due to a rugby injury.*

I would strongly encourage every high school football coach and program to get involved with a current rugby program or start one themselves. Where else can you get this type of skill development, conditioning, team work and competition all the while teaching the core values of athletics and life. Done correctly, high school age rugby can be the difference in the degree of success attained in the football season. The benefits are tremendous and the risks are minimal.”

- **Chuck Gilbert – Defensive Line Coach, Burnsville High School (MN)**

- *College All-American Defensive End, Mankato State University (MN)*

- *10+ Seasons as High School Football Coach*

“This off-season I will be recommending Rugby for my players in order to gain a competitive edge. Two of my starting defensive line are Rugby players, and showed separation from their teammates in competitiveness, quickness, desire and athleticism.”

Perspectives on Rugby (Cont.)

- **Benjamin Brown – Owner, Body Systems Healing and Performance**
 - *Univ. of Arizona RFC, Red Mountain RFC (AZ), Arizona Men's All-Stars, USA Maccabiah*
 - *Master of Science - Exercise & Wellness (Arizona State University)*
 - *Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (NSCA)*

“Rugby is a sport like no other, requiring strength, speed, power, agility and the ability to repeat and recover from intense movements during a game. The sport requires a series of movement patterns separated by intervals of running at various speeds utilizing both aerobic and anaerobic energy systems.

Because of the constant flow of the game and the positional specifics of a 15 man team, Rugby requires superior levels of physical fitness. A typical game involves varying periods of both high-intensity work and active rest. Rugby provides a perfect carryover to training for American football, as players rely heavily on a mix of both aerobic and anaerobic conditioning to enable them to repeat movement patterns and aid in recovery. Explosive movements like rucking, mauling, line-out lifting, sprinting and tackling are anaerobic, utilizing the body's lactic acid system for fuel. This creates an optimal training for similar athletic movements involved in the game of football.

In my experience Rugby players make excellent football players, as they often develop many of the technical skills required to effectively perform. **Combining the improvement of athletic skills with the fitness benefits, I could not think of a better sport for Football players to use as a training modality in the off-season.** Rugby will contribute to making them better all-around athletes, which is what may distinguish great football players.”

Best/Worst Case & Rugby Case

- **Football teams need a way to maintain or improve players' conditioning, skills and athleticism during the off-season**
 - Best Case, without Rugby: Players play another sport such as baseball, lacrosse, tennis, or track, and/or follow conditioning regimens.
 - Worst Case: Players do nothing athletic, or participate in dangerous unsupervised games, i.e. "pickup football."
 - **Rugby Case: Players participate in a team sport requiring superior conditioning and using a similar skill set to Football (run/pass/tackle).**
- **Football teams need a way to maintain players' camaraderie, team spirit, character, discipline, and intensity during the off-season**
 - Best Case, without Rugby: Players play one of several sports together.
 - Worst Case: Players socialize together, or do not interact until Fall.
 - **Rugby Case: Players participate together in a sport known for its strong sense of community, team-first values, and intensely competitive nature.**

Best/Worst Case & Rugby Case

- **Rugby teams need access to the best athletes, who are often Football players**
 - Best Case, without Football: Players are recruited one-by-one to participate in Rugby through friends currently playing.
 - Worst Case: Players are discouraged or prohibited from playing Rugby by Football coaches, who often hold significant leverage via college scholarships and playing time. This is a common problem experienced by many Rugby clubs: Players often feel compelled to hide their participation from Football coaches, or disobey the coaches by participating.
 - **Rugby Case: Football coaches encourage participation in Rugby by players not otherwise committed to a spring sport. To assuage injury and other concerns, Football coaches are involved in conditioning, practices, and other aspects of the Rugby season. Additionally, Rugby clubs gain access to athletes who are accustomed to pushing each other to achieve success as a team.**
- **Rugby teams need better access to school or municipal facilities**
 - Best Case, without Football: Rugby clubs struggle to find adequate practice space, obtain permits for games to be played near home area.
 - Worst Case: Rugby clubs are unable to secure space, and must play games in faraway cities or postpone until mid-April; This detracts from the legitimacy and viability of Rugby clubs.
 - **Rugby Case: Football coaches, in addition to being involved in various aspects of Rugby club's operation, assist club in gaining access to field time, gym time, and other existing but unavailable resources.**

Rugby Off-Season Timeline



- **January, 2010**
 - Football coaches & Rugby coaches meet to discuss players, conditioning plans
- **February & March, 2010**
 - Practice Begins; Focus on basic skills, safety, conditioning
 - Football coaches to attend some practices, observe conditioning, encourage participation
- **April & May, 2010**
 - Regular Season takes place; focus on gameplay, strategy, state tournament
 - Football coaches to continue attending practices as desired, following-up with players to receive feedback
- **June, 2010**
 - High School State Tournament
 - Minnesota Selects All-Star tours to Colorado, Pittsburgh
- **Summer, 2010**
 - Optional participation in Seven-a-Side Rugby Tournaments
 - Football coaches to transition players to Football Practice and/or Strength and Conditioning Programs

*** Typically, High School Rugby teams practice 2-3 days per week in the early afternoon, with one game each weekend. This schedule leaves ample time for players to maintain strength training regimens during the spring, and participate in “passing leagues.”**

Action Items and Outcomes

- **Football Team/Coaches – Action Items**
 - Encourage Football players to participate in Rugby
 - Participate in pre-season planning, practices and conditioning sessions
 - Assist Rugby club in obtaining practice and game facilities, and visibility on campus
- **Football Team/Coaches – Expected Outcomes**
 - Players to be more competitive, aggressive, confident, and “game-ready” in Fall
 - Players to be better conditioned, more athletic, and with better team camaraderie in Fall
 - Football team to have unique advantage through innovative off-season Rugby program
- **Rugby Club – Action Items**
 - Recruit Football players in cooperation with Football coaches
 - Include Football players in team play from February through June, and possibly July/August
 - Improve skills and conditioning of Football players
- **Rugby Club – Expected Outcomes**
 - Benefit from cooperation with Football team by having access to top athletes, better facilities
 - Improve morale, team strength, depth of program by involving more players, parents
 - Experience improved discipline, cohesiveness, dedication by addition of elite athletes

Links & Contacts

For additional information or to find a Rugby Club in your area, please contact:

- **Kurt Hagman, Commissioner, MN High School Boys' Rugby League**
 - kurt@hagmaninc.com
- **Minnesota Rugby Union**
 - www.minnesotarugby.org

Additional Resources:

- **St. Joe's Prep High School Rugby Recruiting Video**
 - club.playrugbyusa.com/video/121
- **Cal Golden Bears – the connection between Elite Rugby and the NFL**
 - www.calbears.com/sports/m-rugby/spec-rel/101008aaa.html
- **USA Rugby**
 - www.usarugby.org
- **International Rugby Board**
 - www.irb.com

Acknowledgements

- **Mike Tolkin, Head Coach, Xavier Rugby**
 - tolkmik@hotmail.com
- **Dave Hodges, USA Eagles Forwards Coach**
 - dthodges1@mac.com
- **Matt Sherman, USA Rugby**
 - msherman@usarugby.org
- **Mark Griffin, Play Rugby USA, Director of Youth Rugby for USA Rugby**
 - mgriffin@usarugby.org
- **Rob Licopoli - Owner, National American Football League**
 - nafl99@yahoo.com
- **Larry Wilson, Coach, Highland Rugby**
 - bigrock33@gmail.com
- **Andrew Mase, Univ. of Cal – Berkeley**
 - amaser@comcast.net
- **Scott Henderson, Burnsville U17/U19 Rugby**
 - scottiehenderson@gmail.com
- **Chuck Gilbert, Burnsville High School Football**
 - Chuck_gilbert44@yahoo.com
- **Benjamin Brown – Owner, Body Systems Healing and Performance**
 - bbrown4110@gmail.com