Rugby Basics for Spectators

Rugby has 15 players on each team. Everyone on the pitch plays offense and defense, and the number of each player signifies that player’s specific position. Jersey numbers above 15 are worn by substitute players.

Players numbered one through eight are forwards, typically the larger, stronger players of the team whose main job is to win possession of the ball. They would be the equivalent to American football linebackers and lineman. Players numbered nine-fifteen are backs, the smaller, faster and more agile players. Their main role is to exploit possession of the ball won by the forwards. Backs may be equated to running backs, wide receivers and quarterbacks in American football.

MOVING THE BALL
Rugby is continuous like soccer. There is no blocking in rugby. Additionally, rugby does not have downs and it is not required to reach 10 yards and stop. The person with the ball leads the attack and there are several ways to move the ball. Any player may carry, pass or kick the ball and play is not stopped and therefore continues when the ball hits the ground or when a player is tackled.

- **Running:** players may continue to run until they are tackled, step out of bounds or run beyond the goal line.
- **Passing:** The ball may be passed to any player. However, it may only be passed laterally or backward, never forward.
- **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.

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 one-meter (three feet) apart from one another. A player of the non-offending team 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 to gain possession of the ball. This is similar to a jump ball in basketball.

- **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.
SCORING

**ANY PLAYER CAN SCORE IN RUGBY!** There are four ways for a team to score points in rugby:

- **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 but requires the ball actually be grounded.
- **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. This is like an extra point in American football.
- **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 penalty or anywhere on a line straight behind that point. The ball can be played if the kick fails.

**Terms:**

- **ADVANTAGE:** After an offense occurs, if the referee thinks the non-offending team might benefit by playing on they may play advantage. The referee will hold up his hand to the team side being awarded the ball not the penalty.
- **TACKLES:** 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 as it does in football.
- **Ruck:** A player who is tackled to the ground must make the ball available immediately so that play can continue. The tackling player must release the tackled player and leave the ruck. Supporting players from both teams converge over the ball on the ground and attempt to push the opposing players backwards in a manner similar to a scrum. The ball may not be picked up by any player, until the ball emerges out of the ruck. All players must join the ruck from behind the 'hindmost' foot of the last player. Players cannot take shortcuts and join from the sides.
- **Maul:** A maul is formed with a similar gathering of players, except the player in possession of the ball is simply held up, and not tackled. The maul ends when the ball emerges.
- **Forward Pass:** A violation that usually results in a scrum to the non-offending team.
- **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.
- **Offside:** The offside line is continually moving up and down the pitch. In most instances, the ball creates the offside line and players are not permitted to participate in play if they are on the opposing team’s side of the ball.
- **Hands in the Ruck:** None of the tackler’s team-mates can attempt to handle or pick up the ball once the ruck has formed. Team-mates of the tackled player can use their hands, but only if they are on their feet.
- **Entering from the Side:** Players cannot take shortcuts and join a RUCK from the sides.
- **Diving In:** All players joining a ruck must be on their feet. But sometimes players dive in off their feet in an attempt to slow the ball down, allowing defenses to re-group.

**Basic Rules:**

The referee signals that he has awarded the ball (advantage) on a penalty to a side (team) by raising his arm towards that side and blowing a blast on his whistle. *Referee uses discretion based upon the violation causing advantage, harm, or sportsmanship of the game.* “Flow” of the game is important. (There are more rules in rugby than any other sport- these are the most common.)

- Failing to release the ball after being tackled, or the tackling player failing to release the tackled player or doing a dangerous tackle on the other player.
- Entering a ruck or maul from the side or Leaving one’s feet in the ruck.
- Scrum infringements: not binding properly on an opponent (for prop forwards) or a team-mate (for other players); leaving the scrum before the ball has emerged from it; not pushing straight against the opposing pack, Deliberately collapsing a scrum
- Being offside and not making an effort to move to an onside position.
- Tackling: a high tackle (dangerous contact is made above the shoulders); tackling a player in the air, or tackling without trying to grasp (wrap-up) the ball-carrier and bring him to ground. Tackling an opponent who doesn’t have the ball.
- Throwing or knocking the ball forwards, or out of play in any direction.
- Obstructing an opponent from tackling the ball-carrier (blocking).
- Any other action the referee considers to be "contrary to good sportsmanship".

**Other Information:**

- Once substituted out, a player may not return. Exceptions: ‘blood’ substitution- when a player has to have bleeding stopped. Props can be substituted back in if an injury occurs.
- If a player is injured on the field, play continues as long as it is not interfering with the game. The referee will stop play for severe injuries (rare), time also stops during this.
- **RUGBY HAS A RUNNING CLOCK!** Each half is 35 minutes and clock does not stop on scoring or out of bounds.