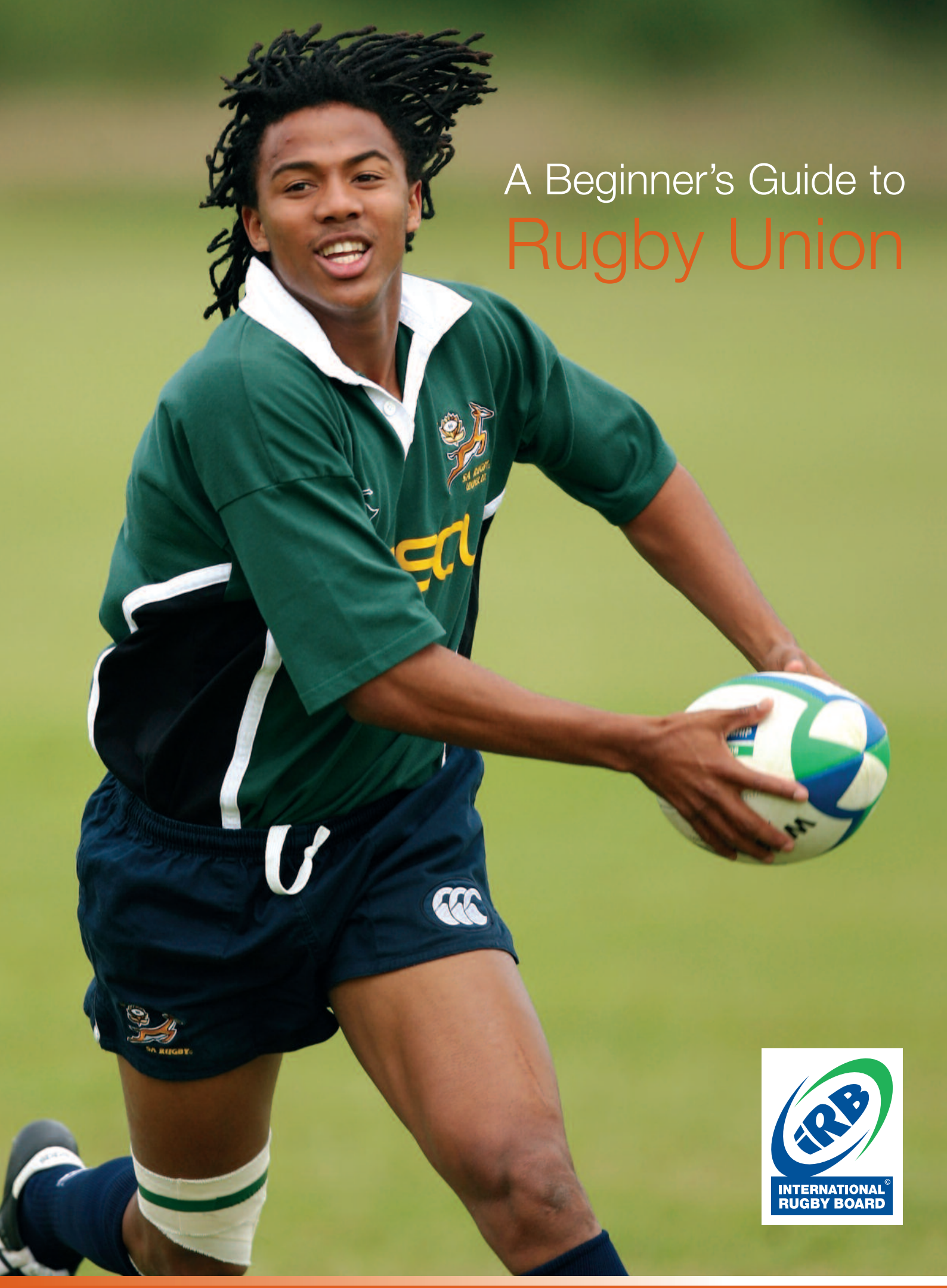


A Beginner's Guide to Rugby Union

INTERNATIONAL RUGBY BOARD

Safety
as a top priority

Rugby is a highly physical Game. To enjoy it to its utmost you need to be physically and mentally prepared. You also need to understand how to play safely.



www.irbrugbyready.com

The IRB Rugby Ready programme educates, aids and supports players, coaches, match officials and Unions on the importance of sufficient preparation for training and playing in order for Rugby to be played and enjoyed while reducing the risk of serious injury.

The web site allows you to read material, watch video, complete an on-line self check test and generate an awareness certificate. Or contact your national Union for details of face-to-face courses near you.

Disclaimer

This *IRB Beginner's Guide to Rugby Union* product has been developed in the context of the Laws applying to accident and injury prevention and medical practice in Ireland and the information and guidelines incorporated on these matters are made available strictly on the basis that the IRB (including its operating entity IRFB Services (Ireland) Limited and other associated entities) does not accept any liability to any person or entity for loss, cost or damage howsoever arising out of any reliance on and/or use of the information and/or guidelines contained in this *IRB Beginner's Guide to Rugby Union* product.

Rugby's history & ethos



Images courtesy of World Rugby Museum, Twickenham and Getty Images

Legend has it that in 1823, during a game of school football in the town of Rugby, England, a young man named William Webb Ellis picked up the ball and ran towards the opposition's goal line.

Two centuries later, Rugby Football has evolved into one of the world's most popular sports, with millions of people playing, watching and enjoying the Game.

At the heart of Rugby is a unique ethos which it has retained over the years. Not only is the Game played to the Laws, but within the *spirit* of the Laws.

Through discipline, control and mutual self-respect, a fellowship and sense of fair play are forged, defining Rugby as the Game it is.

From the school playground to the Rugby World Cup final, Rugby Union offers a truly unique and thoroughly rewarding experience for all involved in the Game.

The IRB Playing Charter

The International Rugby Board publishes a Playing Charter setting out Rugby's basic principles: conduct, spirit, controlled physicality and contest for possession. The Charter's objective is to ensure that Rugby maintains its unique character both on and off the field.



The principles of Rugby are the fundamental elements upon which the Game is based and they enable participants immediately to identify the character of the Game and what makes it distinctive as a sport which is played by people of all shapes and sizes.

The IRB Playing Charter is incorporated within the IRB Laws of the Game and can be downloaded from **www.irb.com** in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Traditional Chinese, Japanese and Italian.

The Game

Rugby is a game in which the object is to carry the ball over the opponents' goal line and force it to the ground to score.

It's simple... but complex

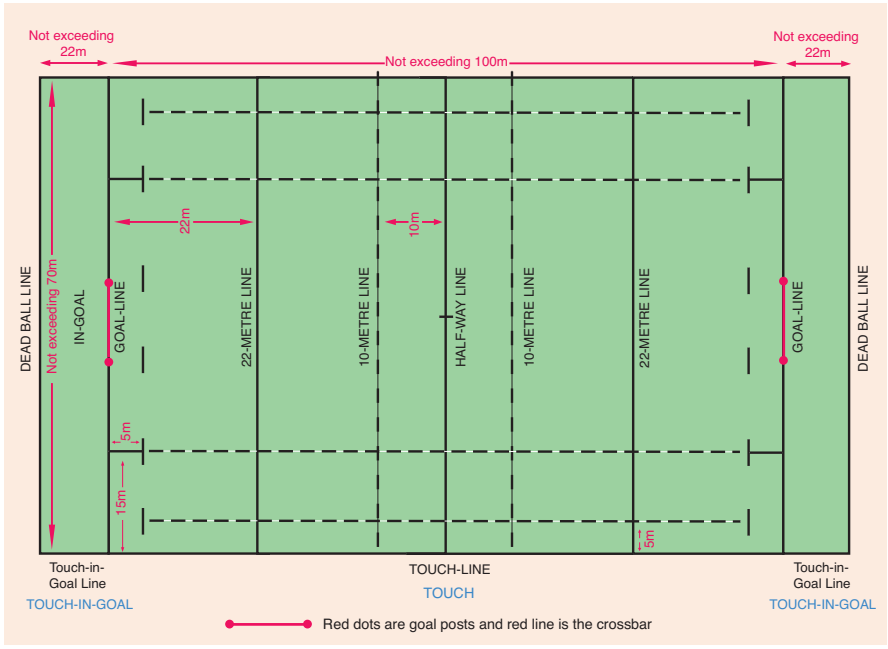
The above description may sound simple - but there is one catch. In order to go forward, the ball must be passed backwards. The ball can be kicked forwards, but the kicker's team mates must be behind the ball at the moment the ball is kicked.

This apparent contradiction creates a need for fine teamwork and great discipline, as little can be achieved by any one individual player. Only by working as a team can players move the ball forward towards their opponents' goal line and eventually go on to win the game.



Rugby has its unique aspects, but like many other sports it is essentially about the creation and use of space. The winners of a game of Rugby will be the team of players who can get themselves and the ball into space and use that space wisely, while denying the opposing team both possession of the ball and access to space in which to use it.

The field of play



Scoring points

Try - 5 points

A try is scored when the ball is grounded over the opponents' goal line in the in-goal area.

A penalty try can be awarded if a player would have scored a try but for foul play by the opposition.



Try signal



Conversion - 2 points

After scoring a try, that team can attempt to add two further points by kicking the ball over the crossbar and between the posts from a place in line with where the try was scored.

Penalty - 3 points

When awarded a penalty after an infringement by the opposition, a team may choose to kick at goal.

Drop goal - 3 points

A drop goal is scored when a player kicks for goal in open play by dropping the ball onto the ground and kicking it on the half-volley.



Kicking

If a player chooses not to pass the ball to a team mate or run with it, that player may kick the ball instead. The kick can travel forwards, but any team mates in front of the ball at the moment the ball is kicked are out of play until either they retire behind the ball or are played onside by a team mate.



Retaining possession of the ball following a kick is a challenge. Kicking strategies include:

- kicking into space, so that team mates have time to run onto the ball before an opponent can get to it
- kicking out wide, at an oblique angle to the field, so that the wing or outside centre can catch the ball
- kicking the ball to touch (off the field of play) resulting in a lineout (see page 9) with the throw-in to the opposition. This concedes possession of the ball but allows the kicking team to contest for the ball in a much more advantageous position on the field.

Open play

The term 'open play' refers to any phase in the match where the ball is being passed or kicked between team mates and both teams are contesting for the ball. In open play, the team in possession tries to get the ball to players in space who can make forward progress towards the opposing goal line.

Kick off

Each half of the match is started with a drop kick from the centre of the half way line. The non-kicking team must be 10 metres back from the ball when it is kicked and the kick must travel 10m towards the opposition goal line before hitting the ground.



Handling



Passing

A player may pass (throw the ball) to a team mate who is in a better position to continue the attack, but the pass must not travel towards the opposing team's goal line. It must travel either directly across the field, or back in the direction of the passer's own goal line.

By carrying the ball forwards and passing backwards, territory is gained.

If a forward pass is made, the referee will stop the game and award a scrum (see page 8) with the throw-in going to the team which was not in possession at the time of the pass. In this way, a forward pass is punished by that team losing possession of the ball.

Knock-on

When a player mishandles the ball, i.e. drops it or allows it to rebound off a hand or arm, and the ball travels forwards, it is known as a knock-on.

This is punishable by a scrum to the opposition and therefore a turnover of possession.



Tackle, ruck & maul

As well as being an evasion game which requires creation and use of space, Rugby is also a contact sport. In fact, contact situations can be the very mechanism by which players create the space they need to attack. The three most common contact situations which occur in open play are tackle, ruck and maul.

The tackle



Only the ball carrier can be tackled by an opposing player. A tackle occurs when the ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and is brought to ground, i.e. has one or both knees on the ground, is sitting on the ground or is on top of another player who is on the ground. To maintain the continuity of the game, the ball carrier must release the ball immediately after the tackle, the tackler must release the ball carrier and both players must roll away from the ball. This allows other players to come in and contest for the ball, thereby starting a new phase of play.

The ruck



A ruck is formed if the ball is on the ground and one or more players from each team who are on their feet close around it. Players must not handle the ball in the ruck, and must use their feet to move the ball or drive over it so that it emerges at the team's hindmost foot, at which point it can be picked up.

The maul



A maul occurs when the ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and one or more of the ball carrier's team mates holds on (binds) on as well. The ball must be off the ground.

The team in possession of the ball can attempt to gain territory by driving their opponents back towards the opponents' goal line. The ball can then be passed backwards between players in the maul and eventually passed to a player who is not in the maul, or a player can leave the maul carrying the ball and run with it.

Advantage

The advantage Law allows the game to be more continuous and have fewer stoppages.

Sometimes, during a game, an infringement of the Laws may be committed where a stoppage in play would deprive the non-offending team of an opportunity to score.

Even though the Laws state that the non-offending team should be awarded a penalty, free kick or scrum, they are given the opportunity to continue with open play and attempt to score a try.

In this instance, the referee will allow play to continue rather than penalise the offence.

Offside

Rugby's offside Law restricts where on the field players can be, to ensure there is space to attack and defend.

In general, a player is in an offside position if that player is further forward (nearer to the opponents' goal line) than the team mate who is carrying the ball or the team mate who last played the ball.

Being in an offside position is not, in itself, an offence, but an offside player may not take part in the game until they are onside again.

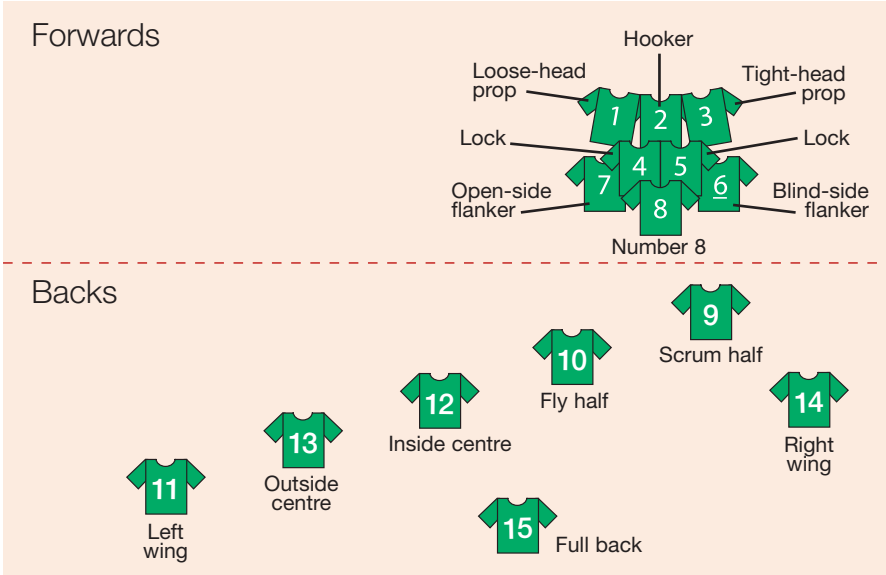
If an offside player takes part in the game, that player will be penalised.

The positions

Rugby Union has always been characterised by the notion that it is a game for all shapes and sizes.

Uniquely, each position requires a different set of physical and technical attributes and it is this diversity which makes the game so accessible to all.

From the power of the forwards to the speed of the backs, there's a place in a Rugby team for anyone who wants a slice of the action.



The names of positions given here are the most commonly used across the Rugby world. However, some regional variations may exist.



Props



What they do: Their primary role is to anchor the scrummage and provide lifting strength and support for the lineout jumpers. Also pivotal in rucks & mauls.
What they need: Upper-body strength to provide stability in the scrum, endurance, mobility and safe hands to maintain continuity of play.



Hooker



What they do: The hooker has two unique roles on the pitch as the player who wins possession in the scrum and usually throws the ball in to the lineout.
What they need: Great strength to withstand the physicality of the front row coupled with speed to get around the pitch and good throwing technique.



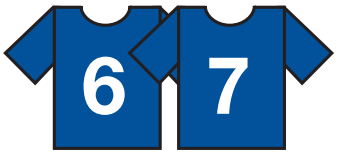
Locks



What they do: Locks win ball from lineouts and restarts. They drive forward momentum in the scrum, rucks and mauls providing a platform for attack.
What they need: The key characteristic is height. The locks are the giants of the team and combine their physicality with great catching skills and mobility.



Flankers



What they do: Their key objective is to win possession through turn-overs, using physicality in the tackle and speed to the breakdown.
What they need: An insatiable desire for big tackles and a no-fear approach to winning the ball. A combination of speed, strength, endurance and handling.



Number 8



What they do: The Number 8 must secure possession at the base of the scrum, carry the ball in open play, provide the link between the forwards and backs in attacking phases and defend aggressively.
What they need: Good handling skills are essential, as is a great awareness of space. Power and pace over short distances is crucial - gaining territory and field position for a quick release to the backs in attack.



Scrum half



What they do: Provides the link between forwards and backs at the scrum and lineouts. A true decision-maker, the 9 will judge whether to distribute quick ball to the backs or keep it close to the forwards.
What they need: A multi-faceted position, the scrum half must be powerful, have explosive speed, all-round handling and kicking skills. The great 9s are highly confident players, with excellent game understanding.



Fly half



What they do: As the player who orchestrates the team's performance, the 10 will receive the ball from the 9 and choose to kick, pass or make a break based upon split-second interpretation of the phase of play.
What they need: The ability to kick well out of hand, ideally on either foot, deft handling skills, pace, vision, creativity, communication skills, tactical awareness and the ability to perform under pressure.



Centres



What they do: The centres are key in both defence and attack. In defence they will attempt to tackle attacking players whilst in attack they will use their speed, power and creative flair to breach defences.
What they need: The modern-day centre is lean, strong and extremely quick. The position demands great attacking prowess, coupled with an intensity in contact to either retain or steal possession.



Wings



What they do: The wings are on the pitch to provide the injection of out-and-out pace needed to outrun an opponent and score a try. Also important to be solid in defence.
What they need: Pace. Wings will often find themselves in open space, when their number one priority is to press the accelerator and run for the line. Strength and good handling are an advantage too.



Full back



What they do: Generally perceived as the last line of defence, the full back must be confident under a high ball, have a good boot to clear the lines and a enjoy the physicality required to make try-saving tackles.
What they need: Great handling skills, pace in attack and power in defence. An ability to join the line at pace to create an overlap and try-scoring opportunities for the winger. Tactical skill and flair.

Equipment

Before playing Rugby, it's important to understand the equipment you'll need.



Firstly, you'll need a sturdy pair of boots with studs or cleats which are appropriate to the conditions. These are essential to providing the purchase you'll require, especially in contact situations.



It is recommended that you wear a mouth guard to protect the teeth and jaw, and some players choose to wear IRB approved head gear and/or padded equipment, worn under the shirt.



The scrum



Signals for scrum awarded (left) and forming a scrum (right)

The scrum is a means of restarting play after a stoppage which has been caused by a minor infringement of the Laws (for example, a forward pass or knock on) or the ball becoming unplayable in a ruck or maul. The scrum serves to concentrate all the forwards and the scrum halves in one place on the field, providing the opportunity for the backs to mount an attack using the space created elsewhere.



The ball is thrown into the middle of the tunnel between the two front rows, at which point the two hookers can compete for the ball, attempting to hook the ball back in the direction of their team mates. The team who throws the ball into the scrum usually retains possession, because the hooker and scrum half can synchronise their actions.

Once possession has been secured, a team can keep the ball on the ground and in the scrum and attempt to drive the opposition down field. Alternatively, they can bring the ball to the hindmost foot of the scrum, where the ball is then passed into the back line and open play resumes again.

The scrum half



The key player at the scrum is the scrum half. This player throws the ball into the scrum, moves to the hindmost foot of the scrum, and is usually the player who picks the ball up and passes out to the fly half who then distributes the ball to the back line. As soon as the scrum half picks the ball up, the opposition may contest for the ball and attempt to tackle whichever player is in possession.

The lineout



The touch judge signals that the ball is in touch and which team has the throw in



The lineout is a means of restarting play after the ball has gone into touch (off the field of play at the side). The lineout concentrates all the forwards in one place near to the touch line, so the backs have the rest of the width of the field in which to mount an attack. The key for the forwards is to win possession and distribute the ball effectively to the back line.

The forwards assemble in two lines, perpendicular to the touch line, one metre apart. The hooker throws the ball down the corridor between these two lines of players. Because the thrower's team mates know where the throw is likely to go, that team has an advantage in retaining possession. However, with speed of thought and movement, the opposition can contest for the ball and the lineout frequently results in a turnover of possession.

The player who successfully catches the ball can keep it and set up a maul, or can pass to the receiver (a player who stands next to the lineout to wait for such a pass) who then passes to the fly half and on to the back line.

Lineout support







To allow players to catch high throws in the lineout, it is permissible for the catcher to be supported by team mates while jumping to catch the ball.

Safety is a prime concern here, and any player who is off the ground must be supported until that player returns to the ground. A player may not be tackled while in the air, and holding, shoving or levering on an opponent are all offences punishable with a penalty kick.

Penalty and free kick

Infringements of the Laws which have a material and significant impact on the opposition are punished with the award of a penalty kick.



Penalty signal

If the place where the penalty is awarded is within range of the posts, the team will usually choose to kick for a goal from a place kick. The ball is placed on a kicking tee and the kicker attempts to kick it between the posts and over the crossbar. Three points are awarded for a successful kick.

A team may choose not to kick for goal. Other options include a scrum, a 'quick penalty' to bring the ball into open play, or kicking for touch (where the kicking team has the throw in to the resulting lineout).

A free kick is awarded for less significant offences. A team may not score points directly from a free kick.

A team may opt for a scrum instead of a free kick.



Free kick signal

INTERNATIONAL RUGBY BOARD

Becoming a match official

Becoming a referee or touch judge is a unique way to experience Rugby.

Most people who become match officials have played the game themselves and are now looking to give something back to the Game they love, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. Anyone can learn refereeing, even from a young age. In fact, for anyone aiming to get to the top of the refereeing profession, starting young is a good idea.

As a match official, you are at the heart of the action and so see the game from a unique perspective. It's a great way to get lots of good exercise, and to test yourself against many challenging situations. Refereeing is not easy, but can be hugely rewarding.

To become a qualified match official, start by asking your club, regional body or national Union about training courses near you. The IRB provides courses for all levels of participant, from novice through to experienced match official.

A basic level training course can be completed in one day, and when combined with some game sense which can only be gained through exposure to rugby as a player or spectator, can set you off on the road to becoming a referee.

Match officials

The match is under the control of the referee and two touch judges. Depending on the level at which the game is being played, there may be other officials behind the scenes such as a time keeper or television match official to adjudicate on replays.



The referee

Before the match, the referee will usually speak to the front row players (the props and the hookers) from both teams, to run through the scrum engagement procedure. This helps to focus the minds of all concerned on this essential phase of the game. The referee then organises the coin toss with the captains prior to the match to decide who kicks off. During the match itself, the referee is the sole judge of fact and of Law. It is essential that all players respect the referee's decisions at all times.

Touch judges

Two judges, one on either side of the field of play, assist the referee in matters of when and where the ball goes into touch and on any other issues as required by the referee. The touch judges also adjudicate on the success or otherwise of kicks at goal.





Foul play

Foul play is anything a player does which is contrary to the letter and spirit of the Laws of the Game, including obstruction, unfair play, dangerous play and misconduct. The referee must sanction appropriately for foul play.

Why did the whistle blow?

For anyone who is not familiar with the finer points of the Laws of Rugby it can sometimes be hard to tell why the referee has stopped play for an infringement. Here we look at some of the most common reasons why the whistle may have blown. Alongside is the signal you'll see the referee make when each circumstance occurs during play. The signals for penalty and free kick are shown on page 9.

Advantage being played



Advantage can be applied to either minor infringements (e.g. knock-on), or offences which would result in a penalty (e.g. offside). The decision has to be made by the referee as to whether there may be more benefit to the non-offending team if play continues. If no advantage occurs, the referee will blow the whistle and bring play back to the place of the original infringement which occurred prior to advantage being played.

Forward pass or knock on



Forward pass | Knock on

Sometimes an attack which seems to be heading towards the try line will be stopped by the referee's whistle.

If a pass has gone forwards, or a handling error has resulted in a knock-on, a scrum will have been awarded to the non-offending team.

Failure to release player or ball



Failure to release player | Failure to release ball

After a tackle, the tackler must immediately release the ball carrier, and the ball carrier must immediately release the ball.

Failure on either of these counts limits a fair contest for possession. If release does not occur within a reasonable time frame, the referee will award a penalty to the non-offending team.

Failure to roll away



Any players on the ground when a ruck or maul is formed must immediately roll away from the ball, so as to allow continuity of play for the team in possession.

Failure to do so will result in the award of a penalty to the non-offending team.

Joining ruck/maul from the side



When joining a ruck or maul, all players must do so from behind the hindmost foot of their hindmost team mate.

If they join from the side, they are in an offside position and taking part in the game, and this will immediately be penalised with the award of a penalty to the opposing team.

Unplayable ball at ruck or maul



Unplayable at ruck | Unplayable at maul

If the ball becomes unplayable in a ruck or maul, e.g., underneath players who are on the ground, but neither team is at fault, the referee will award a scrum to the team who was in possession before the ruck or maul was formed.

Becoming a coach

Becoming a coach, and thereby helping others to enjoy the Game, can be a fulfilling way to be involved in Rugby.

Most people who enter coaching are either former players who want to give something back to Rugby or parents who want to help their children experience Rugby.

Coaching can be a rich and satisfying experience, but it is also a responsibility not to be taken lightly.

Young people in the care of today's coaches are the next generation of players, referees and volunteers, and the attitudes they learn from their experiences can affect many aspects of their lives. As a coach, you could help to give them the confidence to succeed, not only in Rugby but also in life.

Your club, regional body or national Union will be able to help you start on the path to become a coach. A good place to start is with the IRB Rugby Ready programme (see page 2) and you could move from there to a Level 1 Coaching qualification - this takes just one day and gives you a grounding in the basics of coaching.

The coach



The role of the coach varies greatly depending on the level at which the team operates. At grass roots level it's about developing players - technically and personally - while at international level the coach is responsible for team selection, performance and results.

A coach takes on many interchangeable roles, such as leader, manager, teacher and organiser. The coach needs to have a knowledge of the Game and its Laws, motivation, physical fitness and an understanding of how to coach and impove players.

Replacements & substitutions

As well as the 15 players in the starting line up, a team can also have substitutes. The coach can make a pre-agreed number of substitutions, for tactical reasons, during the course of the game. Players can also be replaced when injured, either temporarily while a player receives treatment, or permanently if a player is unable to continue playing.

Team spirit



Another important role of the coach is to instill team spirit into the players. This is especially important at levels where the players take part for the fun of participation rather than the aim of winning.

Team tactics



The source of endless debate, controversy and acclaim alike, developing the right tactics can make or break a team's performance. Far from an easy proposition, but get it right, and you're the world's greatest Rugby visionary - to your players, at least.

Developing tactics requires a thorough understanding of your team's strengths. These tactics will be in part forward dominated and power based, and also reliant on the creation of space and use of pace. As important, is an awareness of the team and individuals you're up against - and the tactics they are likely to employ.

Using power



Using the physical strength of the forwards, in scrums and rolling mauls, can result in significant territory gain. Forward players can 'pick and drive' (gather the ball and take it forward with the support of team mates) until the moment is right to release it to the backs.

Creating space



For all its many complexities, Rugby remains a simple game in essence. Points will be scored when a player is put into space and when an attacking team out-numbers those in defence.
As such, Rugby's holy grail lies in the creation of space. There are many tactics geared towards this, but primarily it's about winning quick ball to move the passage of play away from a concentration of players whilst injecting pace and creativity in attack to make space for a player to score.

Watching Rugby

The pace and power of modern Rugby have made it one of the most exciting spectator sports around. Indeed, several aspects of the Game have evolved as a result of this mass audience appeal.

Large screens

Many stadiums now have large screens on which replays can be seen just moments after the action has taken place.



Television match official

Televised matches have an official who uses replays to advise the referee on decisions according to what the replays show.

However you choose to watch the Game, don't just focus on the ball, try concentrating on the alignment of attackers and defenders and the positioning of certain players, e.g. fly half, number 8 and full back.

Experimental Law Variations



Sometimes the IRB trials changes to the Laws, before deciding whether those changes should be implemented on a global basis and accepted into full Law. Such trials are called Experimental Law Variations (ELVs).

Sometimes, Experimental Law Variations will apply only in a certain region or, for example, only the northern or southern hemisphere.

Experimental Law Variations create a challenge for players and coaches alike, since any change to the Laws provides opportunities for teams to adjust their tactics to take advantage of any additional freedom or restriction brought about by the change.

Therefore, it's important for everyone involved in Rugby to keep abreast of any changes to the Laws.

Details of any current or planned ELVs can be found at **www.irb.com/elvs.**

Rugby in its diversity



Sevens

Sevens Rugby is played on a full size pitch by teams of seven players rather than fifteen. The game is shorter in duration, with each half lasting seven minutes. Aside from that, the Laws vary very little from the 15-a-side game, though of course because of the amount of space available on the pitch, it is a very different game to watch. Sometimes teams will choose to go backwards initially, drawing the opposition towards them, creating space in other areas to then go forward in attack.

Other variations & small-sided games



There are various modified forms of Rugby which are designed to allow anyone to play in any circumstances with gradual development of skills.

Examples of these variations include Tag, Touch, Tip, Flag and Beach Rugby. As an example, in tag, players wear tags which hang from a belt. Removal of one of these tag constitutes a tackle, and the ball carrier must then pass. One of the key attractions of these versions of Rugby is that the non-contact nature means that people of all ages, both sexes and of any fitness level can play together on a variety of surfaces.



U19 & age-grade

Even after moving to a 15-a-side game, there are still certain Law modifications which smooth the transition to the full version of Rugby. Details of U19 Law variations can be found in the IRB Law Book.

IRB training resources

Where to go from here

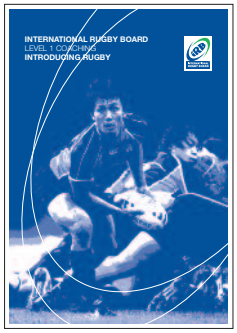
The IRB publishes a range of training and education resources designed to help players, coaches, referees and enthusiasts learn more about Rugby Union and become more involved in the Game.

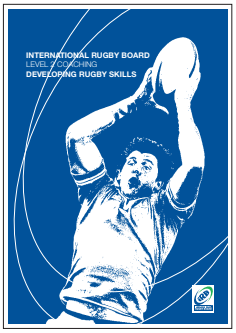
The Laws of Rugby Union - book & DVD



The IRB Law Book is published each year and is also available as an interactive PC DVD-ROM. Your national Union may be able to provide you with a copy of the Laws in your language, or alternatively they are available for download in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Traditional Chinese, Japanese and Italian at **www.irb.com**.

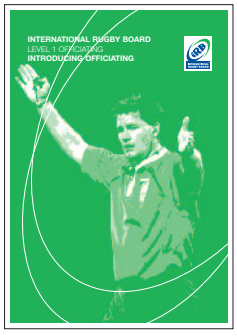
Coaching courses

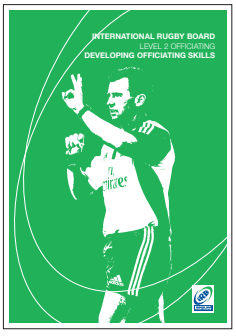




Coaching courses are operated in various locations around the globe on a regular basis. Each level of qualification (1, 2 3 and Sevens) has an accompanying reference resource which also incorporates a course workbook.

Officiating courses





For match officials, and anyone who wants to train as a coach of match officials, there is a series of training courses and accompanying resources available. Your club, regional body or national Union will be able to explain the process of enrolling on a course.

Finding a club

The ethos of Rugby embraces inclusion, and you're sure to find a warm welcome at your local Rugby club or indeed any club anywhere in the world.



Whether it's for your own involvement, or because you'd like to introduce your son or daughter to the Game, your nearest club is the best place to start. Your national Union will be able to provide a list of clubs in your country.

Volunteering in Rugby

One of the most rewarding ways to be involved in Rugby is as a volunteer. There are a wide range of roles for the volunteer, ranging from organisation and secretarial work through to ground care and assisting coaches and players.





A Beginner's Guide to Rugby Union

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If you want to know more, contact your local club or national Union or go to **www.irb.com**