



We'll teach you how to play!

## NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

### **RUGBY 101**

Know what a ruck is? How about the player positions? Read our quick guide to Rugby to learn about the game and help you understand it.

### **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 and 70 meters (75 yards) wide. Additionally, there are end zones that may range between 10 and 22 meters deep, called the in-goal area, behind the goalposts. The goalposts and H-shaped cross bars located on the goal line and are similar in size, though often much taller, than American football goalposts.

### **The Rugby ball**

The Rugby ball is made of leather or synthetic material that is easy to grip and does not have laces. For youth and adult players, rugby balls are made in varying sizes (three, four, or five). Like footballs, Rugby balls are oval in shape but are rounder and less pointed than footballs to minimize the erratic bounces seen in football.

### **Players and positions**

On the field of play, both American football and soccer have 11 players per team. Rugby has 15 players with those same players playing both offense and defense. In rugby, each team is numbered the exact same way. The number of each player signifies that player's position. Players numbered one to eight are forwards, typically the larger, taller players of the team whose main job is to win possession of the ball. They would be the rough equivalent to American football linebackers and linemen. Players numbered nine to 15 are backs, typically the faster and more agile players. Their primary 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.

#### **Forwards**

1. Loosehead prop
2. Hooker
3. Tighthead prop
4. Lock
5. Lock
6. Blindside flanker
7. Openside flanker
8. #8

#### **Backs**

9. Scrumhalf
10. Flyhalf
11. Wing
12. Inside center
13. Outside center
14. Wing
15. Fullback



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### **Starting the game**

Just as in American football, rugby begins with a kickoff to the opponent; in rugby, the kick is made from the 50-meter line at mid-field. Provided that the ball travels 10 meters into the opponents' territory (reaching or crossing the 10-meter line), any players from either team may gain possession of the ball.

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### **Moving the ball**

Unlike American football, rugby has no blocking. Additionally, rugby does not have downs and it is not required to reach 10 yards and stop. Rugby is continuous like basketball or soccer. 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:** When running the ball, players may continue to run until they are tackled, step out of bounds, or run beyond the goal line. Players run the ball to advance towards the opponents' goal line.

**Passing:** The ball may be passed to any 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 at any time. Once the ball is kicked, players of either team, regardless of whether the ball hits the ground, may gain possession. Players typically kick the ball forward to advance it past defenders or to gain territory, especially in relief from poor field position (e.g., deep in their own end). Teammates of the kicking player must be behind the kicker, otherwise they are liable to an offside penalty.

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### Restarting the play

There are several 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. The forwards of both teams form a line perpendicular to the touchline and one meter apart from one another. A player of the non-offending team makes a call and throws the ball in the air in a straight line between the two lines of players; the call signals to his team where the ball is going. Players of each team may be “supported” (lifted) 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 such as a knock-on. A bound group of players from each team form a “tunnel” with the opposition by pushing on each other. The scrumhalf from the non-offending team puts the ball into the tunnel by rolling it into the middle, and each team tries to push forward while the “hooker” hooks the ball with his feet and nudges it to the back row players of his team. The scrumhalf then retrieves the ball and puts it into player.

**Penalty Kick or Free Kick:** A penalty may be called against a team for a serious infringement of the law (e.g., high tackling, offsides, obstruction). The offending team must retreat 10 meters while the non-offending team gets the opportunity to restart play unopposed. If it is a penalty kick, 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 went out of bounds, with the non-offending team given the ensuing throw-in. Teams may also attempt a kick at the goal posts if they are in range; if good, the kick is worth three points. Finally, teams may simply tap the ball with their foot through the penalty mark and run with it. If it is a free kick, the non-offending team's options are limited to tapping through the mark and running the ball.

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### Offside

One of the more challenging aspects about rugby for a first-time observer is the offside law. Like soccer, 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. Simply being offside is not a penalty, but attempting to participate in the game from an offside position is.

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### Tackles, rucks and mauls

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 to the ground, however, play does not stop as it does in football.



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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 converge over the ball on the ground, binding with each other and attempting to push the opposing players back and off the ball in a manner similar to a scrum. This situation is known as a ruck. In a **ruck**, the ball may not be picked up by any player until it emerges out of the ruck. The ruck ends and play continues. A team that can retain possession after the tackled and the ensuing ruck has a huge advantage.

A **maul** is formed with a similar gathering of players, except that the player in possession of the ball is simply held up and not tackled to the ground. The maul ends when the ball emerges.

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### **Scoring**

Try: 5 Points

Conversion Kick: 2 Points


Penalty Goal: 3 Points


Drop Goal: 3 Points

Penalty Try: 7 Points


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### **Other rugby terms**

 **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 goal posts. Drop kicks are also used to restart play after a score or at the 22-meter line after the ball goes dead in the in-goal area.

 **Forward pass:** A violation that usually results in a scrum to the non-offending 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, and results in a scrum to the other team.



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🔴 **Non-contact or “touch” rugby:** A version of rugby designed to introduce the game to younger kids or first-time players. Two-hand-tag replaces the tackle.

🔴 **Penalties:** Penalties occur regularly in rugby. Unlike other sports, there typically aren't yardage penalties and teams do not have to play shorthanded. Instead, the offending team must retire 10 meters while the non-offending team gets the choice to run the ball or kick ahead to gain field advantage.

🔴 **Penalty kick:** Awarded after a serious infringement of the law (e.g., high tackling, offsides, obstruction). The offending team must retreat 10 meters while the non-offending team gets 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 went out of bounds, with the non-offending team given the ensuing throw-in. Teams may also attempt a kick at the goal posts if they are in range; if good, the kick is worth three points. Finally, teams may simply tap the ball with their foot through the penalty mark and run with it.

🔴 **Free kick:** A free kick is awarded to the non-offending team for a slightly lesser infringement by its opponent (e.g., foot up in a scrum). A free kick may not be kicked at goal for three points.

🔴 **Sin Bin:** The referee may send a player behind one of the in-goal areas (the sin bin) for serious and/or repeated infringements for a specified period of time (usually 10 minutes). During this time, the offender's team must play short-handed until the referee allows the player to return to the game. This sort of penalty is fairly rare.

🔴 **Send-offs:** In extreme cases a referee may send a player off the field for dangerous or reckless play. A player sent off is banned from that game and may not return or be replaced.

🔴 **Put-in:** Rolling the ball into the center of the scrum tunnel by the scrumhalf.


🔴 **Sevens:** An abbreviated game of rugby that follows the same laws except that a Sevens team consists of only seven players and each half is seven minutes long. With seven players per team covering the entire field of play, 7s rugby can be a very wide open game and hence very exciting to watch.


🔴 **Set piece:** A term for scrums and lineouts because these are the only choreographed aspects of the game.




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 **Support players:** Players who position themselves to increase the ball transfer options of the ball carrier.

 **Tap and play kick/move:** A gentle kick to oneself used to restart play after either a penalty or free kick is awarded.

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

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