

# SPECTATORS GUIDE TO RUGBY

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**USA RUGBY**

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[WWW.USARUGBY.ORG](http://WWW.USARUGBY.ORG)

## ORIGINS OF RUGBY

Rugby is the precursor of American football and has been played in the United States since about 1870.

American football, as well as basketball, owes many of its characteristics to rugby. In fact, basketball was invented by James Naismith as an indoor alternative to Rugby when the New England winters required an indoor game. Some of rugby's characteristics such as quick switches between attack and defense, ball handling and committing defenders to attack space are all found in basketball. Some people liken rugby to tackle basketball on grass.

Similarly, American football evolved with many of the same principles, strategies and tactics as Rugby. However, there are several obvious differences. Rugby is played at a fast pace, with few stoppages and continuous possession changes. All players on the field, regardless of position, can 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 and there are a maximum of seven substitutions allowed per team. A match consists of two 40-minute halves.

Rugby is considered to be a gender-neutral sport as almost forty percent of all players in the U. S. are female.

## RUGBY ETHOS

All players, coaches, officials, parents and fans are encouraged to remember that rugby holds a unique place in American sport. Rugby is not about hooliganism or violence; however that is often the image of rugby that is projected in the United States. The conduct of every player, coach, official, parent and fan has a lasting effect on the image of rugby in our country. The iRB Playing Charter states:

"Rugby owes much of its appeal to the fact that it is played both to the letter and within the spirit of the Laws. The responsibility for ensuring this practice lies not with one individual -- it involves coaches, captains, players and referees. It is through discipline, control and mutual respect that the spirit of the game flourishes and, in the context of a game as physically challenging as Rugby, these are the qualities which forge the fellowship and sense of fair play so essential to the game's ongoing success and survival.

Rugby is valued as a sport for men and women, boys and girls. It builds teamwork, understanding, co-operation and respect for fellow athletes. It is because of, not despite, rugby's intensely physical and athletic characteristics that such great camaraderie exists before and after matches."

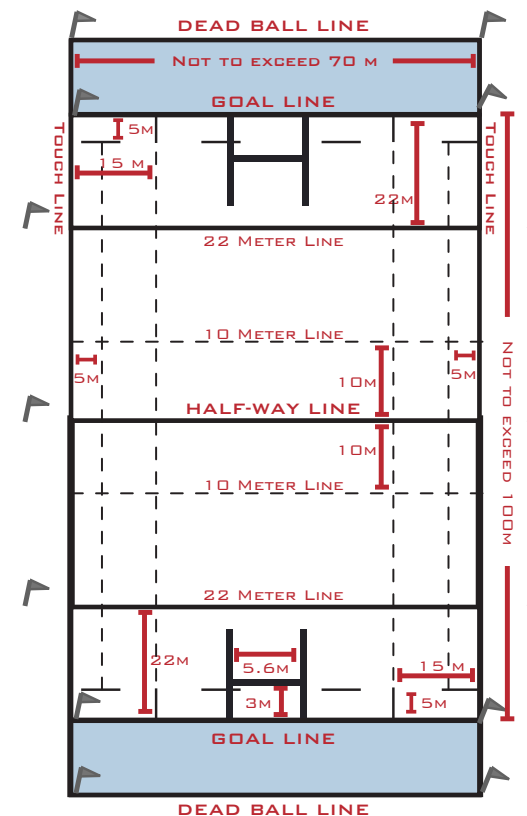
To help further the positive values that rugby engenders, USA Rugby



has partnered with the Positive Coaching Alliance© (PCA). Through its coach education and development programs, USA Rugby promotes the "Double-Goal Coach," who wants to win but has a second, more important, goal of using sports to teach life lessons; and the principle of "Honoring the Game." This includes having respect for the rules of the game, opponents, officials, teammates and self.

## FIELD OF PLAY

Rugby is played on a field, called a pitch, which is longer and wider than a football field, more like a soccer field. Additionally, there are 10-22 meter end zones, called the in-goal area, behind the goalposts. The goalposts are the same size as American football goalposts.



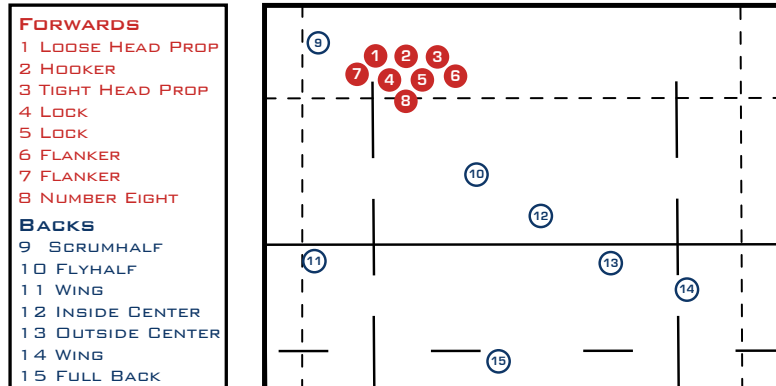
## THE BALL

A rugby ball is made of leather or other similar synthetic material. It is easy to grip and does not have laces. Rugby balls are made in varying sizes (three, four or five) for both youth and adult players. Like footballs, rugby balls are oval in shape, but are rounder and less pointed than footballs to minimize erratic bounces.

## PLAYERS & POSITIONS

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.



## STARTING THE GAME

Just as in American football, rugby begins with a kickoff to the opponent from mid-field. Provided that the ball travels beyond the 10-meter line, any player from either team may gain possession of the ball. You may occasionally see players lift each other to gain advantage here.

## 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:** 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 toward the opponent's 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 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.

## SCORING

There are four ways for a team to score points in rugby by:

- **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.

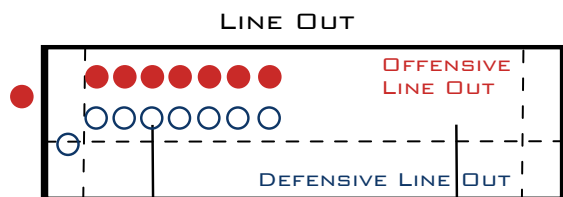
- **PENALTY KICK:** Following a major law violation, the kicking team, if in range, has the option to "kick for points." Three points are awarded for a successful penalty kick. The kick must be from the point of the penalty or anywhere on a line straight behind that point. The ball can be played if the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



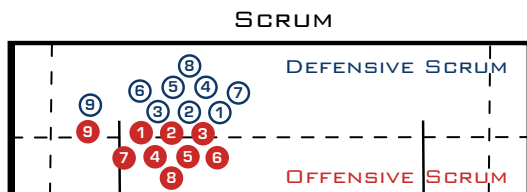
- **DROP GOAL:** Three points are awarded for a successful drop kick. A drop kick may be taken from anywhere on the field during play. A drop goal is similar to a field goal in football; however, in rugby the kick is made during the course of normal play. The ball is alive if the kick fails.

## 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.

## OFFSIDE

One of the more challenging aspects about rugby for a first time rugby observer is the offside law. Similar to 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.

## ADVANTAGE

After an offense occurs, if the referee thinks the non-offending team might benefit by playing on they may play advantage. How much territory or opportunity is needed before advantage is gained depends on the nature of the offense – more for a penalty than for a scrum. Skillful use of advantage can minimize stoppages and provide for a more flowing game.

## 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, however, play does not stop as it does in football.

A player who is tackled to the ground must 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 team that can retain possession after the tackle and the ensuing ruck has a huge advantage.

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.

## 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 goalposts. Drop kicks are also used to restart play after a score.



**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; a scrum to the other team.

**NON-CONTACT RUGBY:** A Version of rugby designated to introduce the game to first time players (touch rugby). 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 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:** A kick is awarded to the non-offending team for an infringement by its opponent. Unless a Law states otherwise, a free kick awarded of an infringement is awarded at the place of infringement. Also, a free kick may not be kicked at goal for three points.
- **SIN BIN:** On occasion, the referee will 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. The team is required to play short-handed until the referee permits the player to return. This penalty is fairly rare, but used by the referees to maintain control of the game.
- **SEND-OFFS:** In extreme cases a referee may send a player off the field for dangerous or reckless play. A player who has been sent off is banned from that game and is not permitted to return or be replaced.

**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 7s 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 7s version of rugby is a very entertaining game to watch.

**SET PIECE:** A term for scrums and line-outs because these are the only choreographed plays of the game.

**SUPPORT PLAYERS:** Players who position themselves to increase the ball transfer options of the ball carrier.

**TAP AND GO:** A gentle kick to oneself, followed by a pick up, 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).

**22-METER LINE:** Balls kicked out of bounds from behind the "22" are restarted by a lineout at the spot where the ball went out. Balls kicked out of bounds from in front of the 22 are restarted by a lineout where the ball was kicked. The exception is a ball kicked out of bounds immediately after a penalty has been awarded. In this case, the lineout is held where the ball went out and the kicking team retains the throw-in.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information about rugby or to learn where to play rugby in your area, please visit the USA Rugby website at [www.usarugby.org](http://www.usarugby.org) or contact:

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