

The Game

Each side attempts to touch the ball down beyond their opponents' goal line while the opponents attempt to gain possession of the ball. Play begins with a kickoff, and from then on a player may run, kick, or pass the ball down the field, hopefully moving closer to the opposing team's goal. Each side has 15 players: 8 forwards and 7 backs. Generally, the forwards deliver the ball to their backs who advance it with speed and cunning. Play is continuous until someone scores, breaks a law, or propels the ball out of bounds ("in touch" as they say).

Rugby is similar to both football and soccer. Like football, an opponent may tackle the ball carrier at any time. However, blocking for the ball carrier is not allowed and tacklers must wrap the ball carrier with their arms. The ball carrier may run or kick the ball forward but can only pass the ball laterally or behind him or her. Like soccer, the game is free flowing. Similar to the off-sides rule in soccer, a rugby player is off-side anytime that he or she is in front of his/her team-mate that has control of the ball or the team-mate that last played the ball. However, being off-side is only illegal if the player who is off-side attempts to participate in the game at that time.

There are basically two major ways to score points in rugby: the try and the kick (like football, kicks must be through the uprights of the goal posts).

To score a try (five points), a player must ground the ball in his/her opponent's end zone. This may be done by running or kicking the ball into the end zone and then touching the ball down for a score. After a try, the scoring team attempts to kick the ball through the goal posts and above the cross bar. This is like an extra point in football except it's worth two points. The kick is taken at any point straight out from the try zone where the ball was touched down.

A team is awarded a penalty kick if its opponents commit a major penalty. Any of three types of kicks may be taken in response to a penalty. The ball may be kicked through the goal posts, kicked out of bounds, or tapped and run with. If it is kicked through the goal posts, three points are awarded. If a team is too far from the goal to try for points, the team will kick down field to gain territorial advantage. If a team is in close, they may choose to tap the ball and run a play. Most penalties are for off-sides or dangerous play.

A drop goal may be attempted at any time during a match by drop kicking the ball through the opponent's goal posts. The ball is literally dropped on the ground and then kicked when it bounces. It is worth three points, but must touch the ground before being booted.

Phases of Play

Rugby consists of two basic phases of play: set play and loose play. Set play includes the scrum, line-out, drop-out, free kick, and penalty kick. Set play is well organized and preplanned. Loose play is largely improvised and highly spontaneous.

The scrum is the most common set play in rugby. A scrum takes place following a minor rule infraction, ball thrown forward or fumbled forward, or when the ball has become unplayable - perhaps smothered in a ruck or maul. The eight forwards bind together while their front row binds onto the opposition. The team not responsible for the rule infraction or stoppage of play is allowed to put the ball into the scrum. Once in the scrum, each team tries to "hook" the ball with their feet and to their side. The ball is heeled back through the forward pack to the scrumhalf who is waiting to run or pass the ball. While

the ball is in the scrum, players are only allowed to touch the ball with their feet. With the exception of the scrum halves, who put the ball in and out of the scrum, other players must be behind the last foot of the scrum. Also, take the eight men in the scrum, line them up side to side and change scrumage to scrumage and you will see how the American football line of scrumage formed.

Line-outs and drop-outs are two other set plays. A line-out occurs after the ball has been kicked or run out-of-bounds. The team not responsible for the ball going into touch re-starts play by throwing the ball in-between the two groups of forwards. The drop-out is a drop kick not for points. This occurs when the attacking team puts the ball into their opponents' end zone, but the defending team grounds the ball. The drop-out is given to the defending team who kicks it from behind their own 22 meter line. Re-starting play this way usually returns the ball to the attacking team in good field position. It is the rugby equivalent of football's touchback.

Penalties and free kicks are two other phases of set play. The referee will signal a penalty by holding his/her arm straight and at a 45 degree angle. The non-penalized team may then decide what to do with the ball (see above under kicking for points). The opposition must retire 10 meters from the point of the foul and may not advance until the attackers touch the ball with their foot in some way. A free kick is signaled by the referee bending his/her arm to form a right angle. Any form of kick may be taken, but points may not be scored directly from a free kick.

Loose play is the second phase of rugby. Tackling and support are two important parts of loose play. When a player is tackled he or she must release the ball. For the attacking team, then, support is critical. Team members must help the ball carrier by being in an area where they can receive a pass, or retrieve the released ball after a tackle.

A ruck is a loose variation of a scrum and is formed after a player is tackled and the ball is on the ground between at least two opposing players trying to push each other over the ball. Similar to the scrum, only feet can be used to move the ball out of the ruck. A maul occurs when the ball carrier has been stopped, but not tackled to the ground. Members of his/her team will bind onto him or her and attempt to keep possession of the ball. A maul differs from a ruck in that the ball is held up in a maul and is on the ground in a ruck. If the ball becomes unplayable in a ruck or maul, a scrum is formed. On a ruck, the team starting with the ball gets to put ball into the scrum. On a maul, the opposition gets to put the ball in.

On rucks, mauls and tackles, think of a 6' x 6' box forming around the players. Players need to come into the box going toward their try line. If other teammates are there, they much join with the hindmost person. Joining in front of that person is offsides and a penalty will result. Thus coaches yelling "Get in or get out!"

There is an "advantage" rule that allows the game to keep moving despite infractions. Sometimes the referee deems that the team who did not infringe may in some way, gain an advantage (for example, field position, or points) if the game simply continues rather than stopping for the official award of a penalty or free kick. The referee will indicate advantage is in effect by raising their hand in the appropriate manner, but will not whistle to stop play. However, if the team awarded the advantage does not gain territory soon thereafter, the referee will then stop the game and return to the site of the original infraction for a set play.