



**CHICAGO  
DRAGONS  
RUGBY  
FOOTBALL  
CLUB**

## **RUGBY 101: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS**

The primary inspiration for this document came from the International Rugby Union's "Introducing Rugby Manual" which can be viewed and downloaded in .pdf format from IRU's website at at <http://www.irb.com>.

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Picture and diagram credits are given in the body of this publication where appropriate, deserved and/or known.

Finally, thanks to my fellow Chicago Dragons for their input, comments and feedback.

Your comments on this document would be most appreciated so we can improve subsequent editions of it.

Copyright 2005, Chicago Dragons Rugby Football Club, Inc.  
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Last updated August 29, 2006, by Paul Popp then Secretary

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## **WHO ARE WE?**

The Chicago Dragons Rugby Football Club (CDRFC) is the first predominantly gay men's rugby team in the Midwest.

CDRFC was founded in early 2003 for the purpose of providing groups historically underrepresented in the sport of amateur rugby, particularly homosexual and bisexual men, the opportunity to learn and play the game in an open and supportive environment.

CDRFC is a 501(c)(3) exempt organization and a full, playing member of the Chicago Area Rugby Football Union (CARFU), the Midwest Rugby Football Union (MWRFU), and the International Gay Rugby Association and Board (IGRAB).

The club plays two seasons each calendar year, Fall (September-November) and Spring (March-May), each consisting of 4-11 matches, mostly with our friends and neighbors in CARFU and MWRFU, , but also usually including one match against another IGRAB team.

Through their league competition, the club builds bridges between the straight and gay communities through sport. To that end, we sponsored over Memorial Day Weekend 2005 the first, friendly tournament where both "straight" teams from the Chicago area and IGRAB member teams played against each other.

At the international level, the club also competes in the Bingham Cup tournaments. The Bingham Cup was founded in memory of Mark Bingham, founder of the San Francisco Fog Rugby Club and passenger on United Airlines Flight 93 which was hijacked on September 11, 2001 and crashed in rural Pennsylvania after a group of the passengers, including Mark, attempted to regain control of the aircraft from the hijackers.

We also competed in the 2006 Bingham Cup, which was in New York. We celebrated much success placing 5<sup>th</sup> in the Bowl Division with a continued goal of competing in the Cup Division in 2008.

Our website is <http://www.chicagodragons.org>; we also support a Chicago Dragons Info group on Yahoo! for people who wish to receive timely updates on the team, its practices and matches, and other activities.

### **A PAINLESSLY SHORT (WE HOPE) HISTORY OF THE GAME**

The game of football (what we would call soccer today) as played at the Rugby School (Rugby, England) between 1750 and 1823 permitted handling of the ball but no one was allowed to run with it in their hands towards the opposition's goal. There was no fixed limit to the number of players per side and sometimes there were hundreds of players taking part in a kind of enormous rolling maul (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1: The Good (Bad?) Old Days Circa 1800**

Many believe that rugby was born in 1823 when William Webb Ellis "with fine disregard for the rules of football (soccer) as played in his time, first took the ball in his arms and ran with it, thus originating the distinctive feature of the Rugby game."

Although it is worth pointing out that this is *apocryphal* and truly rests in the "cool/humorous anecdotes/stories to tell your friends" category of anecdotes because there is little in the way of evidence to substantiate this view. However, it is the popular view. So popular, in fact, that the international committee named the rugby world cup the "William Webb Ellis Trophy."

William Webb Ellis aside, however, we do know that the innovation of running with the ball was introduced sometime between 1820 and 1830.

During the middle of the 19th century rugby football, which up until that time had been a regular game only among school boys, took its place as a regular sport among men. The former students of Rugby school (and other rugby-playing schools such as Marlborough School) started to spread their version of football (Rugby rules) far and wide.

Arthur Pell, a former Rugby School pupil, founded a Rugby rules football club at Cambridge University in 1839. The Old Rugbeians challenged the Old Etonians to a game of football and controversy at the Rugbeians' use of hands led to representatives of the major public schools

(Rugby, Eton College, Harrow, Marlborough, Westminster and Shrewsbury) meeting to draw up the "Cambridge Rules" in 1848.

By the 1860's two distinct types of football had developed--handling and nonhandling. In 1863 supporters of the nonhandling game formed the Football Association (association football or soccer). In 1871 21 amateur clubs established the Rugby Football Union and drew up the original Laws (not rules, Laws) of the game.

Rugby spread across the globe and competition emerged between countries. It was introduced in the United States in 1875, although the lack of precise rules, ambiguities in the game and complexity of the sport drew a lot of players away from the game and caused major changes in the game.

For example, in 1880 the scrum was replaced by a line of scrimmage, drawing emphasis away from the free-running characteristic of the game. The game continued to play under rugby rules until 1905 when the publication of photographs of a particularly rough game between Swarthmore College and the University of Pennsylvania caused a public outcry. President Theodore Roosevelt insisted on reform of the game to reduce the brutality, with the implicit threat of abolishing the game if steps weren't taken. As a result, the forward pass was added in 1906, giving birth to the game of American football.

Although a handful of clubs remained active, rugby did not re-emerge in the United States until the 1960's when many college students turned to the sport because it was one where many could play and escape the rigid discipline and professionalism inherent in organized collegiate football. Minimal costs, constant action and the opportunity for frequent play with a primary emphasis on fun were instrumental in attracting many to the sport during this period.

Between 1964 and 1980 the number of rugby clubs in the United States grew from about 80 to over 1,000. Today there are more than 1,400 with more than 100,000 players. The United States of America Rugby Football Union (USARFU), the sport's governing body in the United States, was formed in 1975. Today, that organization is now known as USA Rugby and is based in Denver, Colorado.

While rugby alternately stagnated and was reborn in the United States, the sport flourished elsewhere in the world, especially in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. It is now played in over 100 countries and is the third-most popular team sport in the world in terms of participation and television viewership. The sport's international governing body is the International Rugby Football Board (IRFB), located in Dublin, Ireland.

The rules of rugby continue to evolve, but amateurism remains its dominant characteristic, although in 1995 the IRFB passed a resolution allowing national governing bodies and local rugby clubs to pay their players.

The growth of gay-friendly men's rugby teams has been remarkable for a sport which otherwise has been relatively stagnant in the United States for the last twenty years, both in terms of numbers of active teams and participants, while rugby worldwide has grown and retained its position as the world's third most popular team sport.

In mid-2002 there were only five gay-friendly men's rugby teams in the United States; today there are almost twenty, with more in the process of formation. This has prompted the organizers of Gay Games 2006 to include full-contact rugby as an event in the Gay Games for the first time, even though rugby hasn't been played in the Summer Olympics since 1924. The club will be competing at Gay Games 2006.

## **NUTS AND BOLTS OF THE GAME**

### **OBJECT**

Simply, the object of rugby is to score as many points by carrying the ball into the opposing side's try zone or kicking it between the goals posts in the opposing side's try (i.e., goal) zone. The ball may be carried, kicked or passed laterally or backwards, but it may not be passed forward.

### **LENGTH OF AND SUBSTITUTIONS DURING THE MATCH**

Rugby matches are made up of two 40-minute periods of play, broken by a period of not more than ten minutes at half-time (after which the teams change sides) and by not more than a two-minute period for each permitted delay in the match.

The action in rugby is more continuous than in American football. Rugby has no scrimmage and no series of downs. Play is uninterrupted except when scores, penalties, or the ball goes in touch (i.e., out of bounds). After a score, play is restarted with a kickoff from the center of the halfway line. Any time taken for injuries is added on to the half in which it occurs.

Substitutions are limited to seven per team. Substitutions may only be made when the ball is dead and with the permission of the referee. If a player is substituted, that player can't return and play in that match even to replace an injured player—unless his substitution was caused by injury. However, if a player leaves the match by order of the referee for a rule infraction, his team must play with one fewer player.

### **THE FIELD**

A rugby match is played on a grassy, rectangular pitch (i.e., field). The lines which form the ends of the pitch are called the goal lines; the lines which form the sides of the pitch are called touch lines;

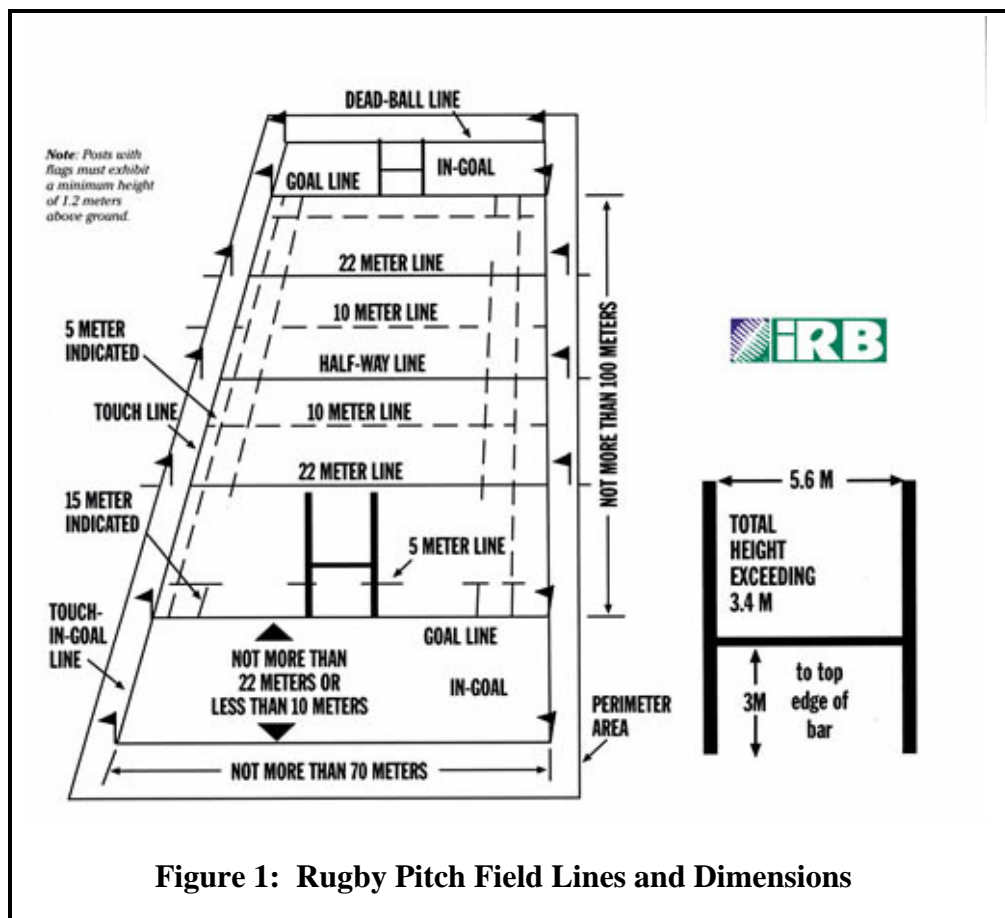
The maximum dimensions of a rugby pitch are 100 meters in length (i.e., the distance from goal line to goal line) and 70 meters in width (i.e., from touch line to touch line).

None of these lines are considered to be part of the field, i.e., if a player carrying the ball treads on a touch line the ball is said to be in touch (i.e., out of bounds and therefore out of play). The goal line is part of the goal area, not the field, so an player grounding the ball on or over the goal line on the opposing team's side is awarded a try.

Goal posts similar to those in American football are used. They are placed on the goal line at opposite ends of the field, at the beginning of each try zone. They are "H" shaped and can be any height providing they are a minimum of 3.4 meters and the distance between the two uprights is 5.6 meters. The cross bar must be 3.0 meters above the ground. The lower part of the uprights is padded to prevent injury to a player striking them.

Beyond the goal line at each end is the "in goal" area (the equivalent of the end zone in American football), no more than 22 meters deep.

The pitch is bisected by a "halfway" line. In rugby (unlike American football), each team's ten yard line is ten yards from the halfway line, not the goal line. To help visualize the layout of a rugby pitch, a diagram is included at Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Rugby Pitch Field Lines and Dimensions**

Flags (typically set back one meter from the touch lines) are used to mark where the goal, 5 meter, 10 meter and half-way lines meet the touch lines.

In addition to the goal and halfway lines, the following lines are usually drawn inside the field and are very important to the conduct of the game:

- 1) 22 meters off the goal line--Used to indicate where a player can catch the ball from an opponent's kick, knock-on or tap-kick and make a 'mark'. i.e. to stop play and opt to take a free-kick (place, drop or tap. A defensive player must be behind his/her own 22-meter line to make a mark
- 2) 10 meters off the halfway line--Used to indicate where the ball must reach on a kick-off.
- 3) A 5 meter dotted line is drawn along the lengths of the field measured off the touch (out of bounds) line. This line is used to indicate the distance from the touch line when a line out is formed.

When you're playing rugby, however, the following lines are the most important--as a player, you should know their significance and where they are in relation to the ball at all times during the match:

- 1) The **halfway line** bisects the pitch into two equal halves. Kick-offs to start a match, to start the second half, and to resume play after a try happen at this line.
- 2) The **goal line** at either end of the pitch is, obviously, the line you must cross to score a try, but in rugby you may also score by placing the ball on the line or touching the goal post with the ball.
- 3) The **touch lines** run the entire length of the pitch and indicate the field-of-play. A player that steps on or over that line is said to be "in-touch" (out of bounds, in American football). If that player happens to be in possession of the ball then play stops and is restarted with a set piece (or formation) called a line-out, which we will explain later.
- 4) The **22-meter lines** are a special and initially confusing aspect of rugby. They are 22 meters from each goal line and figure prominently in deciding whether to kick the ball in open play.

If a player is behind his own 22-meter line he may decide to kick the ball in-touch. While this would be disadvantageous in many other sports, in rugby it can be very strategic because play resumes at the point the ball went in-touch.

Even though the opposition gains the right to control the "throw-in" of the ball to resume play at the line-out (and because possession of the ball typically changes so frequently) a good kick can gain your team valuable meters.



## **THE BALL**

Rugby is played with an oval-shaped, leather-covered, inflated ball that is fatter (i.e., more rounded and less pointed) than an American football. Because of this, a rugby ball is more easily drop-kicked than the American football, and the scoring system encourages this tactic. Attempts at place-kicking a goal after a try has been scored are made with the defending team lined up behind their goal line--the kicking team must be behind the ball--until the kicker starts his run up to the ball, when the defending team may try to block the attempt at a goal.

## **SCORING IN RUGBY**

Scoring in rugby may be by grounding the ball in the opponent's "in goal" area by making a "free" or penalty kick for a goal and by drop-kicking the ball for a goal during the play.

The following table lists the ways to score points in Rugby League (amateur) play and how many points each scoring opportunity is worth:

<b>Try</b> (carry/kick the ball over the opponents goal line and touch it down).	<b>5 points</b>
<b>Conversion or goal</b> (following a try a kick over the posts in line with where the try was scored).	<b>2 points</b>
<b>Goal from a Free kick or Penalty kick</b> (following a free kick/penalty a kick over the posts from the position of the award).	<b>3 points</b>
<b>Drop goal</b> (a drop kick over the posts).	<b>3 points</b>

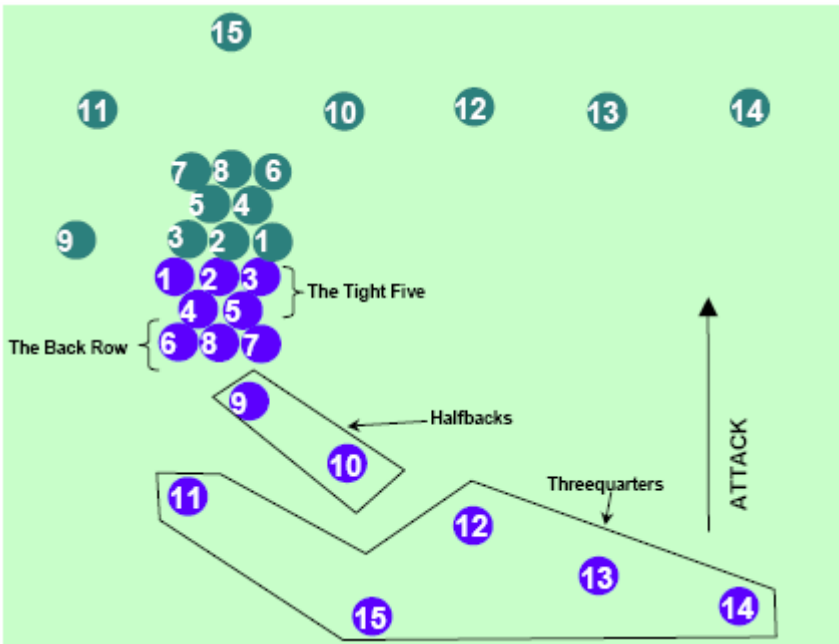
**Figure 2: Methods of Scoring and Points for Each in Rugby Union Play**

## **THE PLAYERS AND THEIR POSITIONS**

The amateur form of the game we play has 15 men on each team and is called Rugby Union.

The professional game is called Rugby League, and although it resembles the amateur game in many respects there are differences in the Laws and scoring and each team has only 13 players.

In the amateur form of the game the fifteen men on the field are divided between eight forwards and seven backs (two halfbacks, four three-quarter backs, and a full back). Figure 3 is an overhead view of the start of play in a Rugby Union game.



**Figure 3: Overhead View of a Rugby Team at the Start of Play**  
(Credit--San Francisco Fog Rookie Primer 2.0)

Descriptions of each functional unit of a rugby team on the field and of individual position are as follows:

### **THE FORWARDS (POSITIONS 1-8)**

Positions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are known collectively as The Tight (or Front) Five. These players serve primarily as ball winners during the scrum.

Positions 1, 2 and 3 are known as the Front Row, Positions 4-5 as the Second Row and Positions 6-8 as the Back Row, each term reflecting those players' respective position in the scrum. More about the scrum in a bit.

### **PROPS (POSITIONS 1 and 3)**

Props are so named because they literally prop up the hooker during a scrum.

The #1 position plays on the left hand side is also called the "loose head prop" because his head is positioned on the outside of his opponent's head in the scrum and is responsible for supporting the hooker and assisting in gain the ball through put-in during a scrum.

The #3 position plays on the right side and is known as the "tight head prop" because his head is positioned inside his opponent's head in a scrum and he is responsible for disrupting the opposition's loosehead prop and hooker during a scrum.

Props need to have significant upper-body strength, be effective participants in set pieces (scrums and lineouts) and be able to add to play in rucks and mauls. Typically they are big, powerful individuals.

### **HOOKER (POSITION 2)**

The hooker is the main ball winner on the team. In the scrum, the hooker wins the ball by “hooking” the ball with his feet and tries to move it back towards his teammates, who in turn strike it back to the No. 8 and out of the scrum.

The hooker needs to have attributes and skills similar to those of a prop, but he also needs to have significant flexibility to allow for greater range of motion during scrums, as well as the ability to effectively and accurately throw the ball into lineout. More about lineouts in a bit.

### **LOCKS (POSITIONS 4 AND 5)**

So called because they “lock” the Front Row (Positions 1-3) into the scrum, giving it power and stability. Locks are typically taller and possess good strength, especially in their legs. They also provide the lineout with height and must be able to add to play during scrums and lineouts.

### **FLANKERS (POSITIONS 5 and 7)**

Flankers are usually the most aggressive players on a rugby team. They’re the guys you’ll see sticking out at the back of a scrum on the left and right hand sides. They can be bound in tight if needed but typically they’re only providing power to the scrum with one shoulder thus allowing them to break away for attack.

Flankers need to have superior cardiovascular fitness, demonstrated speed, strong tackling skills, evolved ball-winning and retention skills and tactical decision-making skills because they frequently end up with the ball and/or support the backs while they advance the ball.

### **EIGHTMAN (POSITION 8)**

The Eightman is a key position on the team. His primary responsibility in the scrum is to keep the ball at his foot until the scrumhalf is ready to pass it out. However, the Eightman also have the option of breaking from the scrum by picking the ball up and running with it. Thus, the Eightman has to have both good strategic sense and be a good tactician who’s proficient at reading the defense.

### **THE BACKS (POSITIONS 9-15)**

#### **THE HALFBACKS (POSITIONS 9 AND 10)**

The halfbacks are the scrumhalf and flyhalf. These two players comprise two of the most important positions on the team because because they are the link between the forwards and the backs.

### **SCRUMHALF (POSITION 9)**

The scrumhalf is the pivot around which the majority of the attacks take place. He has to make quick, decisive decisions (pass? kick? run?), often under very real pressure and those decisions directly and significantly affect the team's prospects of scoring.

The scrumhalf has to know a variety of passes, kicks and other techniques that no one else on the team has to master. Physically, he is typically one of the smallest guys on the team but he has to be very fit because he does a lot of running.

### **FLYHALF (POSITION 10)**

The flyhalf is *the* most important position on the team. He has to be able to read the field and anticipate where holes can and will develop in the defense. He also has to be a superior tactician. Like the scrumhalf, he must have a well-developed skill set, particularly in handling and passing, managing contact, tackling and kicking.

The flyhalf determines how the rest of the backs are arrayed when the ball enters play. With the help of the inside center he also creates space in which the threequarters maneuver to advance the ball.

### **THE THREEQUARTERS (POSITIONS 11-15)**

The threequarters are the two centres, the two wings and the fullback. They are also known as the finishers because it's their job to advance the ball and score the try once the forwards have won possession and the halfbacks have brought it out

### **WINGS (POSITIONS 11 and 14)**

The wings are the fastest men on the field and are usually the folks who score the tries. Wings (a.k.a., wingers, wingmen) must have excellent timing and be able to constantly read the other team's backs for hints of counterattack.

There are two types of wings, blind side and open side, and the person at this position will play both during a game, depending on where the scrum is positioned on the pitch. Wingers come in all shapes and sizes, but speed and agility are the main physical requirements for a wingman because they'll often recover deep kicks from the opposing side, in addition to firing their way forward during offensive plays through the defense. They also need superior passing and handling skills.

### **CENTERS (POSITIONS 12 and 13)**

There are two centers--the inside center (Position 12) typically works with the scrumhalf and flyhalf to create the platform on which the rest of the backs will score while the outside center (Position 13) will usually work more with the wings and the fullback. In both cases, their main job is to create space for the remaining backs to score in.

Both centers are usually average height and lean to athletic build with very strong shoulders and lower bodies, the bigger and stronger centre being the inside center, and the leaner and faster being the outside center. They need have superior handling and passing skills, as well as excellent tackling, catching and kicking skills. Centers also need good peripheral vision.

### **FULLBACK (POSITION 15)**

The fullback is a key position because he is the team's the last line of defense. A fullback needs many qualities and skills. He has to be brave because he'll make and take most of his tackles at full speed, often in open field and unsupported. He also has to be able to catch the high kick from the opposing side under pressure, and he is usually the best kicker on the team. Physically, fullbacks come in many shapes but he must be strong in the shoulders and lower body.

As you can see, there's a position in rugby for basically for every type of person. Next up, we'll discuss the equipment you need to play rugby.

### **RUGBY EQUIPMENT**

As you can tell, rugby often calls things by different names than other sports. So, for the sake of clarification, in rugby your gear/equipment is referred to as your kit.

We've divided this section into three subsections:

- 1) Equipment that is essential in order to play the game;
- 2) Optional equipment, but you don't have them in order to play;
- 3) Where you can buy the components of your kit.

### **ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT**

You can't play rugby safely or effectively if you don't have the following items:

#### **Mouth Guard (\$2 - \$25, \$5+ for a decent one)**

No question, this is the most essential piece of gear you will own. If you play rugby, you're going to get whacked often and repeatedly in the mouth variously by balls, fists, elbows, knees, cleats and any number of other things.

Mouth guards do two things: (1) they protect your teeth from impact and resulting damage, and; (2) protect against head concussions. The Chicago Dragons do not allow anyone to practice, much less play, without one.

Two higher end models which are worth every penny are the Wipps Brain Pad (which also comes in a model specially designed for folks who wear braces) and the Shock Doctor, both about \$20.

#### **Jersey (\$20- \$100, Typically \$30-\$50)**

Especially when it's warm outside you may think a t-shirt is fine for practice, that is, until it gets torn to pieces two minutes after practice starts. Basically, practice jerseys are essential gear

because they're constructed to withstand the constant pulling and tugging you'll experience practice and matches and not rip.

However, two or three practice jerseys can run you over \$100, which adds up quickly; two lower cost options some of our members have used are the following:

1) You can often get a great deal on a jersey from a vendor with overruns (too many jerseys made for a team) and "uglies" (jerseys made from random fabric scraps, but as well-constructed as any other jersey). For example, Ruggers.com sells a practice kit for about \$80 where you get an "ugly" jersey, shorts and socks for about \$80.00

2) Go check out the Salvation Army or similar philanthropic organizations' second-hand stores. It sounds rather odd, but don't be surprised if you find surprisingly large numbers of slightly/gently used rugby jerseys suitable for practices for only a few dollars apiece.

There are three considerations to take into account when ordering a jersey:

1) Material--Most jerseys are made of cotton, but you'll find quite a few out there made of synthetic materials. Synthetic materials are lighter and tend to breathe more. They are ideal for 7s play during the summer, when it gets hot. Blends (usually cotton and polyester) and pure cotton jerseys are good, all-purpose jerseys.

2) Style--There's the classic style and there is 7s style. The classic style has a full collar and tends to be made of cotton. 7s jerseys have a banded collar and are usually made of synthetic materials. Most folks stick with the classic, non-7s style for practice purposes (and because the main rugby season is played in the fall and winter, when it is colder and foggier), but it really doesn't matter.

3) Fit-- The best fit for a rugby jersey is going to depend on measuring your chest and your own preference for a tighter or looser fit.

Jerseys are sized according to your chest measurement. If you are getting a cotton shirt, the rule of thumb, it is "your suit jacket size plus 2" because 100% cotton garments may shrink based on how you launder them. If your chest size is 42 it's probably a good idea to order a size 44 or 45. However, this doesn't apply if you're buying jerseys made of blended fabrics or synthetics.

You can also use your t-shirt size as a gauge. If you wear a large t-shirt, then your rugby jersey size is roughly between 44 and 46. However, this is not always a reliable way to size your jersey.

Most manufacturers size rugby jerseys as follows: *Chest sizes* M (40-42), L (44-46), XL (48), XXL (50), XXXL (52), but always check before you order.

Ruggers split on how tight the jersey should be. Some subscribe to the idea that the tighter the fit, the more difficult for someone to grab your jersey and use it to tackle you.

Other folks like their jerseys a little looser, if only because a looser fitting jersey is much, much easier to remove when wet, muddy and/or sweat-soaked. Also, remember that generally it's much easier to fit an undershirt of whatever sort (*e.g.*, cotton or polypropylene) *and/or* shoulder pads (see "Protective Gear", below) underneath your jersey if it's cut a little looser.

### **Shorts** (\$20-\$40, Typically \$23-\$29)

If you want to play well (and protect any residual shred of personal modesty you have left since joining this sport), you need a good pair of shorts. As with comparing t-shirts to rugby jerseys, ordinary athletic shorts rip too easily for use in rugby practices and matches. Like rugby jerseys, rugby shorts are specifically constructed to stand up the demands of the game.

Shorts come in two styles: New Zealand and British. New Zealand-style shorts are a one-piece short that has a shorter, athletic cut which fits tighter than British-style shorts and supposedly improves mobility. They are the most popular style short on the pitch. British-style shorts are usually longer and fit more loosely and have a fly with plastic buttons and a drawstring.

Rugby shorts typically come with pockets, although Canterbury and KooGa both make a pocketless version. The lack of pockets makes the shorts extremely strong, and keep the cost down around \$25.00

If you are a forward lifted in lineouts, you may want to invest in a pair of lineout shorts. Lineout shorts have reinforced stitching and stripes on the inside that improve lifting.

Sometimes the manufacturers will indicate small, medium, large, etc. instead of waist sizes but typically provide a conversation table so you can figure out which size is for you.

Finally, many rugby players wear compression shorts beneath their rugby shorts.

### **Rugby Socks** (\$5-\$12, Typically \$8)

Knee-length socks with turnover tops are a traditional part of the kit—they help protect your shins from getting even muddier, cut up and bruised than they would if you were wearing shorter socks.

### **Boots** (\$35 - \$120, Typically \$75)

Rugby cleats (*i.e.*, boots) are the most important element of your kit after your mouthguard. A cheap and ill-fitting pair of boots will simply make your time in practice and in matches just miserable.

However, like anything that's very important to your performance as a rugby player trying to find properly fitting boots can be both frustrating and time-consuming.

Because in all likelihood you'll end up ordering your boots the internet a good suggestion is to go to a local vendor who sells soccer cleats and try on (but *don't* buy) soccer cleats to get some idea of your preferences.

Boots come in three different cuts: high, mids and low. Figure 4 explains some of the differences between them.

Cut	Ankle Coverage	Ankle Support	Typically Worn By
High	Entire ankle	Firm	Prop, Lock, Eightman
Middle	Covers half the ankle	Good, but allows some mobility	Hooker, Flanker, Scrumhalf, Flyhalf, Center, Fullback
Low	None	None	Hooker, Flanker, Flyhalf, Center, Fullback, Wing

**Figure 4: Characteristics of Different Types of Rugby Boots**

You may run into dealers who differentiate between soft-ground and hard-ground boots. Soft-ground boots are made for playing on pitches that are wet or muddy. They have long metal studs. These are the kinds of boots most ruggers wear when playing 15s. Hard-ground boots are made for playing on short grass or Astroturf pitches. They are very similar to soccer shoes, have short, molded plastic studs or rubber studs and are typically used for summer 7s play.

Here are some general guidelines:

- 1) Take your time and do your research. There are many brands, types and styles of boots.
- 2) Shop in the afternoon when your feet are naturally slightly swollen and try boots on while wearing rugby socks to help get a proper fit.
- 3) You will have to break your boots in—most materials (both natural and manmade) used to make the uppers of rugby boots stretch and then mold to the wearer's foot.
- 4) Choose close-fitting shoes to facilitate better feel for the ball if you are a back and may be kicking the ball more often or one that gives the best traction if you are a forward.
- 5) Your boots should fit properly in both shape (i.e., the uppers should be supple but conform to your instep) and length (i.e., there should be at least a finger's width of space between the tip of the big toe and the end of the shoe).
- 6) Don't forget to buy plenty of extra spikes. You'd be amazed how quickly you wear individual spikes on your boots down, especially if you pronate or supinate your foot while walking and running. Practicing and/or playing in boots with differentially worn spikes is an invitation to foot and ankle injuries.



Take care of your boots—they'll be more comfortable to wear and last much longer if you do. If they're wet or muddy wipe as much moisture and mud from them as quickly as you can after the match or practice. Next, stuff them with newspaper or paper towels to help them maintain their shape. Finally, dry them naturally, but away from direct sunlight.

Don't use artificial heat to dry your boots—doing so will probably warp and crack the uppers and turn them into something about as supple as buffalo hide, and they'll just be hell on your feet.

### **Practice Ball and Pump (\$10-\$70, Typically \$30)**

You CAN get away with it, but we really, really do recommend you get your own ball, especially because the only way you'll get used to handling the ball is by having your paws on one often and for significant periods of time. Besides, rugby is sport, your baby, your passion—how can you say you're a rugger if you don't own a rugby ball? It's rather like saying you're a golfer, but you don't own your own clubs—not terribly convincing, huh?

It's not that expensive, either. Ruggers.com stocks a very decent ball for about \$25.00; other sites/manufacturers sometimes stock and sell their own private label balls for even less. Finally, don't forget to get an air pump so you can keep your ball properly inflated.

## **OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT**

You may want to invest in the following items at some point, depending on your needs/wants and/or which position(s) you play:

### **Kit Bag (\$30-\$80, Typically \$40)**

A duffle bag works just fine, but a kit bag has compartments specifically for your cleats, rugby balls, dry/clean clothing, loose items and other stuff.

### **Scrum Cap (\$50 - \$90, Typically \$60)**

If you're a forward and taping your ears for scrums isn't working, consider buying and wearing a scrum cap. Some backs wear them, but I'm not sure why.

## **Protective Equipment**

### **Shoulder Pads (\$60-\$120, Typically \$70) and Shin Guards (\$9-\$39, Typically \$20)**

Although most folks who play rugby still wear no protective equipment, some do. In particular, if you are prone to shoulder injuries or bruised shins (the former more common in forwards, the latter more common in backs), you should consider wearing shoulder pads and/or shin guards.

Any protective protective equipment you wear on the pitch needs to be IRB approved. You wear rugby shoulder pads under your jersey. To determine your size measure your chest with a tape measure just under your armpits/across your nipples.

Sizing in shin guards is usually related to height. If you're 5'8" or shorter, you'll probably be a medium size shin guard (usually 8.0" - 8.5"). If you are over 5'8", you'll probably be a large (usually 9" - 10").

Finally, it's a good idea to wear neoprene (i.e., NOT METAL) supports/braces for your knees, ankles, elbows or wrists, as needed. However, make sure to show your coach any such supports to be sure they're acceptable.

## **SUPPLIERS**

For the most part you'll do your kit shopping on the internet. Here are a few decent suppliers:

**American Rugby Outfitters** (<http://www.americanrugby.com>)--If you're looking for the U.S. national team's clothing and merchandise, you go here.

**Matt Godek Rugby Store** (<http://www.rugbystore.com>)--Often have specials, visit fairly often to see if you can snag something you've been wanting/waiting for at a discount. With regards to boots, if you don't see what you're looking for, call them because their website sometimes only shows what's on sale.

**Red Rhino** (<http://www.redrhinosports.com>)--Well-designed site and good prices.

**Rugby Imports** (<http://www.rugbyimports.com>)--Another reliable source. Has a great selection of non-jersey rugby-clothing as well as a good selection of books and videos.

**Ruggers** (<http://www.ruggers.com>)--Highly recommended.

Finally, two other things to keep in mind:

- 1) Don't wear jewelry on the pitch—Not allowed and not advisable; it can injure you and will probably get damaged/destroyed/lost anyway.
- 2) Remove any body jewelry or piercings—See #1, and keep in mind that you're liable to injure yourself seriously if you keep such things in while playing rugby.

Next, we'll discuss some basic concepts integral to playing rugby.

## **PLAYING RUGBY--SOME BASIC CONCEPTS**

Before we get into the specifics of how a rugby game is played we'd like to familiarize you with some concepts integral to playing the game.

### **PASSING**

Unlike in American football, there is **NO** forward passing in rugby. Forward passing is **NOT** allowed. Do **NOT** pass the ball forward—you will be called and your team penalized.

If the ball carrier cannot elude a tackler, he will usually try to pass the ball laterally (to the side) or backward.

However, be forewarned—if you shave your lateral passes too close invariably what you think isn't a forward pass and what the referee sees are two different things. It's an easy way to draw a penalty. Don't do it.

In rugby a pass is usually made underhanded with both hands. Also, carrying the ball in both hands allows you the maneuverability to pass the ball either left or right or to kick. Later on, after you're gotten some matches under your belt, you may tuck the ball if you're running full speed down the pitch or if you're fending off tacklers, but for now we ask that you use both hands to carry and pass the ball, even when running.

### **BEING ONSIDE (OR, DON'T GO OVER TO THE OFFSIDE)**

A rugby match at full tilt looks like a donnybrook sponsored by anarchists, but it really isn't as loopy-goopy as it seems. A perfect example of the overarching Laws and concepts which govern play during a rugby match is that of being "onside", and its opposite, being "offside".

Being offside in rugby is a very bad thing because it can get you called and your team penalized and it takes you out of the action. As you'll see shortly, the two are often functionally intertwined during a match.

There are literally dozens of ways of being off side, so don't worry about memorizing them all right now. However, you'll learn them all eventually, quite often by surprise, usually as a result of a shrill whistle blowing nearly in your ear and always accompanied by your muttered curses those of your teammates.

Typical examples are:

- 1) At a scrum, ruck or maul a back stands in front of an imaginary line made by the hindmost foot of the players involved in a scrum, ruck or maul—that back is off-side and the referee can call him an penalize his side, or;
- 2) A teammate behind you kicks the ball forward—at that moment you are off-side because the ball was played behind you. If you then proceed to play or handle the ball you'll be called and your team penalized. You **MAY NOT** play the ball until you become on-side, either by him running in front of you or as a result of various other actions by your teammates and/or the opposition.

So, you won't be called and your team penalized for simply **BEING** offside unless you intervene in play. That's okay, but the downside is that you're basically useless to your team if you're in such a position. What do you do? Simple--get your butt to an on-side position as quickly as possible so you can (literally) get yourself back in the game.

But, you may ask what if someone on the other side runs past me carrying the ball? Well, he just caused you to turn from offside to onside—go get him!

Just remember: Stay on everyone's (i.e., the referee's, your coach's and your teammates') good side by always being onside.

## **OBSTRUCTION**

In rugby, any player may tackle, hold or shove an opponent who is holding the ball. The operative phrase here is, "holding the ball" and is very, very important. Unlike in American football, if you shove, tackle, hold, strike or block any player who is **not holding the ball** it's called obstruction, is illegal and will get you called and your team penalized, usually by giving the opposing team a penalty kick at the mark where the infringement occurred.

## **THE BALL IS ALWAYS ALIVE**

During a match the ball is always alive unless it's gone in touch (i.e., out of bounds) or the referee has stopped play by blowing the whistle. If the referee has stopped play he/she will indicate how play will be restarted, so just remain attentive and listen for his/her instructions.

If the ball is loose, any player who is on his feet can pick it up and continue play. Basically, if you can get to it, pick the d\*mned thing up and run (preferably forward) with it until you hear a whistle.

## **RELEASING THE BALL**

You don't get to keep the ball when you're tackled in rugby. When you go down you have about two seconds to release/place the ball on the ground, hopefully in the general direction of your teammates.

If you don't release the ball in a timely fashion the referee will call you for playing the ball on the ground and your team will be penalized. Once you have released the ball you are allowed to get up and regain possession but only if you are on both feet.

## **KNOCK ONS**

This one is pretty simple, unlike the concept of being offside--A knock on is a penalty called when a player moves the ball forward on the ground by propelling it by some means other than kicking it. "Huh?" you may ask...okay...

For example, if you miss a catch and the ball bounces off your torso and forward it's a knock on and you will be penalized. Obviously, this makes picking up and catching the ball while moving at speed a potentially tricky matter. But, with practice you'll get good at it, and (one hopes) you won't be committing too many knock ons.

To help avoid knock ons, you may also fall on the ball and then immediately get up and run with it if you can't pick it up off the ground while you're on both feet. The key word here, though, is, "immediately."

## **PLAYING ADVANTAGE**

A key concept in rugby is that of playing advantage. In this, a referee may see an infraction but choose not to stop play and call the penalty if the non-offending team gains territory anyway. Thus, advantage can be either gaining ground despite illegal conduct by the opposing team or being granted a tactical advantage by having the referee call the penalty against the offending team if they gain advantage as a result of the illegal conduct.

For example, a referee sees a knock on during play, but may wait to blow the whistle until it becomes clear who gains from the knock on. So, if the non-offending team gains possession of the ball and advances fifteen meters after the knock on the referee may not call the penalty at all. This helps keep play flowing smoothly and makes the game more enjoyable for players and spectators alike.

Remember, ALWAYS keep playing until you hear the referee's whistle. You may have seen an infraction or even committed one yourself, but the referee simply may not have seen it or is marking it and waiting to see who gains advantage off the offense before calling it. Play continues and no infraction has occurred until the referee blows the whistle.

## **ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR PLAYING RUGBY**

For all you fans of such systems as “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”, there are five vital skills all rugby players must have in order to be effective on the field. They are:

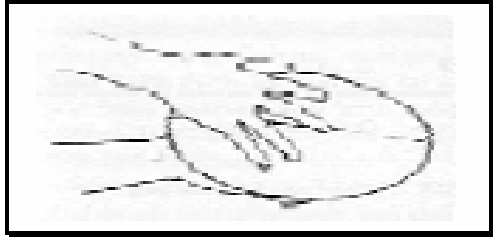
- 1) Holding and passing the ball
- 2) Catching and handling the ball
- 3) Tackling and managing contact
- 4) Running and fending off tackles
- 5) Kicking the ball.

### **1) HOLDING AND PASSING THE BALL**

As we discussed in the previous section, you can't pass forward and that lateral passing has the potential to get called by the referee as a forward pass. That leaves passing *backwards*, which is what most passes are in rugby. This also explains the diagonal line-up of the backs at the start of play (See Figure 3).

The exact technique can vary, depending on your position, speed of movement, the play, but you have to understand that you want the person receiving the ball to be able to catch it. Passing and catching are inextricably linked skills. If you make a beautiful pass which your teammate drops, it doesn't matter; similarly, if you always make terrible passes, few people are going to be able to catch them.

So how should you hold and pass the ball? It's actually simpler to do than to describe, but using both hands, you hold the ball firmly with both hands with your fingers spread across the ball's seams. The contact between the seams and your hand will help you maintain your grip on the ball--See Figure Y.



**Figure 5: How to Hold a Rugby Ball**

The ball is passed in an underhand fashion (sort of like you're shoveling) using your fingers to control the ball, not your palms. As you prepare to release the ball, twist your torso towards the receiver. Aim for the receiver's hands, which should be at chest level and a little forward. Figures 6 and 7 show proper passing form.



**Figures 6 and 7: Proper Passing Form**

Another basic idea in passing the ball in rugby is that you should lead the receiver. The receiver stays at an angle sufficiently deep to receive the ball while moving at a decent or high rate of speed. The receiver should already be running forward before the passer releases the ball so that the receiver is accelerating into the ball as he/she catches it.

The passer turns his/her body toward the receiver prior to releasing the ball and passes the ball a little in front of the receiver. The receiver catches the ball while flying past the passer, putting the passer onside and eligible to receive a pass from the new ball carrier.

The distance between passer and receiver when the ball is released can vary on the circumstances of play and other things, but a general rule of thumb is about five meters in a diagonal (or wing) formation, but of course this can change on the flow of play. For example, sometimes a passer will skip the nearest player in support and go for a player more to the outside. At other times you might come in closer to receive a pop pass or a handoff. For now, however, just think 5 meters.

If you're new to the sport get your own ball so you can play with it, move it about and get a feel for it. Practice passing it in the correct, (i.e., two-handed and underhanded) manner until you do so without thinking about it. Practice recovering the ball by placing it on the ground, running up to it, planting one foot to one side of the ball and then scooping it up and tossing it backwards in the other direction.

Find a grassy spot and practice running up and falling on the ball and then getting up quickly (with the ball of course). Find a buddy to practice with. And remember, you have to pass both left and right, short and long. Vary the routine and keep doing it—it'll serve you very well on the pitch.

## **2) CATCHING AND HANDLING THE BALL**

To succeed as a rugby player you must be skillful in executing the basic ball-handling techniques. During play the ball may arrive at different angles, heights and velocities, any of which may affect your ability to catch the ball and do something useful with it.

For example, a pass that arrives from behind at knee height may be difficult to catch and bring to your waist while you are running at pace and attempting to maintain balance. A key factor in becoming comfortable with ball handling techniques is getting used to the unique shape and feel of the ball early on, which is why we highly recommend you buy and practice with your own ball.

While we discussed how to hold a rugby ball in the previous section, it's always a good idea as a relative rugby novice to carry the ball in two hands, even when running with it. This allows you to either pass or keep the ball safe when a tackler grabs hold of you. It also allows you to make more accurate and powerful passes in open play.

While it's acceptable to hold the ball along your forearm or tuck it into your ribs near the elbow when running in the open field, holding the ball in these ways makes it more difficult to readjust the ball when you need to pass it, something that can come up both unexpectedly and very, very quickly.

Always remember that when running with the ball tucked in, you must always be prepared to readjust your grip to pass the ball with two hands. This is something you'll learn, given practice and time.

All right, we've talked about why you need to know how to catch and handle the ball under different game conditions, but what do you do when you're playing and someone on your team is carrying the ball and is about to get tackled?

Get yourself in a position (onside, obviously) to receive the ball and yell like hell for it. Rugby is a very vocal game; teams who play well are constantly yelling to each other--who's where, who needs support, what's going on with the ball, who needs to move to cover a hole in the field, who's got what part of the play covered, etc., etc., etc.

As part of this, while the ball carrier can suppose his teammates are all behind him ready to accept a pass, the only way he knows who's backing him up and who's able to take the ball is by having his teammates yell that information to him.

This is why you **MUST** let the ball carrier know where you are, that you're coming up, and that you're ready to receive the ball. Typically, you'll be yelling things like "On your right/left!" "With You!" "Ball!" or "Behind You!" loudly and repetitively.

Not surprisingly, some people don't like yelling or being yelled at (including your author, before he started playing rugby), but if you want to play you'll have to get used to it because it's part of the game and it isn't meant personally against anyone. But, when you have 30 people running around an area upwards of 7,000 square meters, how else are you going to communicate?

So what if someone makes a crappy pass and you're supposed to catch it? This happens all the time, and you'll figure out what to do in time, but for now here are two tips:

- 1) If the pass is too low to catch, fall on the ball and get up immediately. Or, simply pick it up or kick it (but not into the hands of an opponent please). Trying to catch a low pass often results in a knock on, and thus a penalty.
- 2) If you're good at this sort of thing then go for it, but generally anything below the knees is too low to catch safely. If the pass is too high you need to think quickly and size up the defense before you attempt your amazing catch.

We've talked about what to do if you're receiving a crappy pass, but what do you do when you've got the ball but don't have a good pass to get rid of it?

First, while this may be very hard to do when the pressure is on, **don't dump the ball in a panic just because someone is about to hit you.** This sets you up for an intercept or potentially puts the person on your team receiving the pass in the position of getting creamed by the opposing side.



Your first line of action is always your best if you simply don't know what to do and you're not in a critical field position where kicking would be preferable (i.e., behind your own 22-meter line): **RUN FORWARD, RUN FORWARD, RUN FORWARD.**

If you can't run forward, you have four options:

- 1) Make contact and stay on your feet as long and driving forward as much as you can;
- 2) Take the tackle and release the ball to your teammates;
- 3) Form a ruck, or;
- 4) Form a maul.

We'll talk more about 3) and 4) in the "Phases of Play" section.

### **3) TACKLING AND MANAGING CONTACT**

To many folks, (including this one), tackling is a lot of fun. Can and does it hurt? Yes, sometimes, but not as often or as much as you might think. Oh, and remember that only the ball carrier can be tackled--if you tackle someone other than the ball carrier it's obstruction and your team will be penalized.

Tackling is very much about technique--a relatively small player who knows how to tackle can and will bring down a much, much larger player the vast majority of the time.

In one (relatively long, grin) sentence, proper tackling technique in rugby means coming in low and hard against the ball carrier, wrapping your arms his/her hips (or thereabouts), sliding down, squeezing the ball carrier's knees together, twist your body, and BANGO! over he/she goes, hopefully with you on top. You'll be shown how to execute tackles so you do land on top of the ball carrier so you're in a position to wrest the ball away or set up a ruck.

There are several other things about tackling you need to know:

- 1) You are not allowed to tackle above the shoulders. This is called high tackling and it's both dangerous and illegal. If you make a habit of doing so, get accustomed to racking up penalties against your own team and (if not immediately then definitely in time) getting yourself thrown out of the game.
- 2) You are also not allowed to "fly" at your opponent, i.e., you must have at least one foot on the ground during the tackle.
- 3) You can't trip a player.
- 4) You can't spear the ball carrier.

Okay, obviously, it's more fun to tackle than to be tackled, but as far as being tackled goes, it doesn't always have to be so bad.

First, try to stay on your feet. If you are tackled to the ground, don't just lie there. Get up on your feet, keeping in mind that you may pick the ball up immediately upon doing so. If you can't play the ball, tackle the opposing team's player who (now) has the ball!

Finally, remember that when you're tackled you're allowed a split second to place the ball to your team's advantage, but if you don't release the ball in a very, very timely manner your team will be penalized for playing the ball on the ground.

Good coaches and teams spend a lot of time talking about and practicing proper tackling technique because it keeps their players from getting injured and pays big dividends when playing defense.

### **Managing Contact**

Managing contact is a key strategic skill. Why? It's about controlling the ball on our own terms. You will want to have a repertoire of skills you can call upon should you find yourself in a situation where you are tackled or restricted. Managing contact allows us control over how play will develop after contact so that either (1) you can release the ball securely to a teammate and we can continue the attack, or (2) we can give up the ball in a manner that allows us to defend on our own terms.

Making contact with either ground or player is a skill that requires what seems to be difficult and unpleasant work at first. Few people enjoy it at first. For every rookie tackle jockeys who thoroughly enjoy the rough and tumble of rugby, there are five rookie players who take a while to achieve a "confidence in contact" which will stay with them for the rest of their rugby careers. It takes time to build up the courage to confidently take a hit and know what to do once it has happened. It takes courage to tackle someone coming at you at full speed.

### **4) RUNNING AND FENDING OFF TACKLES**

Running. We do a lot of running. A rugby match consists of two 40-minute halves with no time-outs. A lot of that time is spent running. Of course, there are breakdowns in play and penalties and setting up scrums and line-outs, and these are opportunities to catch your breath, but in general the better your wind and the faster you run the better you'll do at rugby.

Speaking of which, imagine running down the pitch with the ball and here comes a pesky opponent determined to put an end to your moment of glory. We already discussed some options for managing contact but you have another. Push the b\*st\*rd out of the way! It's called fending and you do it by tucking the ball under one arm and using your other arm to shove your opponent (aka the Heisman), hopefully to the ground. As with everything else in rugby there are laws that govern what is and is not allowed. For now just remember you may not fend off an opponent above the shoulders and may not use a clenched fist or elbow (drat, that).

## 5) KICKING THE BALL

Everyone loves kicking the ball and doing so with accuracy is essential to the sport. However, not all kicking involves sending the ball in a high, long arc most of the way down the pitch.

One very useful short kick is the pop kick. The idea here is to kick the ball up and over your opponents and catch it yourself. You have the momentum. Your opponents have to turn around and chase you, and, double bonus, they can't touch you because YOU DON'T HAVE THE BALL! This takes practice to learn, but you can do it.

Another useful short kick is the grub kick (or grubber), where you kick the ball along the ground through a hole in the defense while you pursue it like a border collie after a frisbee. This is done to best effect if the opposing team has closed in; if they're far away and spread out one of them will just recover the ball and run it back to you. Also, remember not to commit a knock on when recovering the ball and to get up immediately if you fall on the ball to recover it.

Three other things to keep in mind: 1) A rugby ball bounces erratically and can be difficult to recover; 2) You must be prepared to pursue the ball wherever it goes unless you're ready to lose possession or let the opposing side run your kick back up to and past you, and; 3) When any of your teammates kicks the ball you must run to it either to recover it or stop the advance if the opposition recovers it.

Both the pop and grub kick are fairly short distance kicks but there are also long distance kicks that are done for different reasons. At this point we won't go into the many, many scenarios that can apply but just remember that when kicking for distance, just like in the shorter kicks, the kicker is always trying to put the ball somewhere advantageous to his team.

So why would anyone decide to give up possession by kicking the ball away? Simply, there are many reasons which can apply, depending on the situation, but it's a very common and strategically sound thing to do when the opposing team is breathing down your goal line.

For example, the opposition is marching down the field, but you snag the ball behind the 22-meter line and you kick the ball fifty meters down the field before it goes in touch. Because play resumes at the point the ball went in touch, you just pushed the opposition fifty meters back from your try line. Good job, rookie!

This also applies when you have been awarded a penalty kick anywhere on the field. However, if you kick it directly out when you are in front of your 22-meter line, the ball comes back in from the point it was kicked, so you gain no distance.

We also discussed earlier that kicking figures very prominently in both set pieces and penalties in rugby. First, the match begins with a kick off from the halfway line to the opposing team, ditto with the second half.

Second, there's the penalty kick. If your kicker gets the ball between the goal posts it's worth three points. These kicks are taken from where the penalty was awarded.

Finally, there's the conversion kick. After either side scores a try (worth five points) a team has the opportunity to rack up two more points by kicking the ball through the goal posts.

The tricky thing about the conversion kick is that it's taken lengthwise anywhere down the pitch from the point your teammate touched the ball down in the opponent's try zone. So, if you score a try do it as close to the middle of the pitch (i.e., between the goal posts) as possible because it makes the conversion kick that much easier.

## **PHASES OF PLAY**

The key to understanding the seeming chaos of a rugby match in progress is knowing the **phases of play** in rugby. The first phase is always a **set play**, like a kick-off, a scrum or a lineout. Aside from a kick-off, set plays are formations that are unique to rugby.

Each of these set pieces involves the two teams getting into known, established formations so they can fight for possession of the ball. Set play is very organized and somewhat predictable, unlike most of what follows afterwards.

Once the ball is out of the set formation (i.e., after it's been received, comes out of the scrum or is thrown into a lineout) **loose play** begins. Loose play is characteristically spontaneous and exciting. The different phases in loose play are marked by what are called **breakdowns**. Breakdowns (i.e., rucks and mauls), are so named because they break down the continuity of play and thus the flow of the game.

Generally speaking, attacking teams try to avoid breakdowns because it means the defending team has been successful in stopping their advance. It is not unusual for an attack to have five or six phases before a penalty is called, possession of the ball reverses or the attacking team scores.

## **SET PLAYS**

### **KICKOFFS**

Teams usually line up for cleat inspection and salutations before the game. A coin toss determines the team which will kickoff first. The kicking team will send their forwards to one side of the pitch at the 50 meter line. The opposing forwards will move in front of their opposites, but spread out behind the 10 meter line in preparation to receive the kick.

The kickoff is taken from beyond the center of the halfway line. The ball must be kicked beyond the opponent's ten-yard line, after which any player on the receiving team who is "onside" (not ahead of the ball in the direction it is advancing) may take possession of it.

The kicker, who can be any member of the team, will set the ball on the ground and start the match on the referee's whistle most often kicking the ball high and short to the opposing forwards (he can also kick it long and deep or away from the forwards if desired).

The kick must travel forwards at least 10 meters and land in bounds. The kicker's forwards will charge down the pitch attempting to catch the ball themselves. If a receiving team's forward

successfully catches the ball, he will attempt to advance the ball normally running into a large amount of opposition. His supporting forwards will then often bind around him to prevent him being brought to the ground and losing possession of the ball.

The second half of a match is started in the same way except the teams have switched ends of the pitch and the team starting the match kicking now receives the ball.

Simple enough. Okay, but rewind to the opening kickoff. Assume for the sake of discussion that you just caught the ball. What are your options?

*1) Pass or hand the ball to another player*—However, in rugby **the ball may only be passed backward or laterally (sideways)**. If you pass it forward, it's a penalty. This is the fundamental difference between rugby and American football.

*2) Kick the ball forward*—Which you can do either on the ground like a soccer ball or in the air. Unlike American football, in rugby kicking is often used, both for tactical and strategic advantage.

*..3) Run with the ball*--Preferably towards the other team's goal line, but sometimes funny things happen.

So, you try one of these four, but some nasty person from the other team intercepts or recovers it. Drat, hate that. Okay, so how can you get the ball back?

*1) Tackling the opponent with the ball*. Once you've tackled the guy, the guy must release the ball on the ground (usually placing it towards his teammates). As the tackler you've got to release the guy you tackled, too.

However, as we discussed earlier, **the tackle does not stop play in rugby**. In fact, the whole point of the player releasing the ball is to allow play to continue. Once that ball is released on the ground, it's fair game to be picked up by anyone. You can pick it up too, *if you are on your feet*. If you try to pick up the released ball before you are on both feet, it's a penalty call "playing the ball on the ground."

*2) Ripping the ball away from the opponent with the ball*—Not exactly very sporting, but often highly effective.

## SCRUMS

If you've ever seen a rugby match then you most likely have seen a scrum with all the grunting and pushing. According to the laws of rugby "the purpose of the scrum is to restart play quickly, safely and fairly, after a minor infringement or stoppage." Forming a proper scrum is a big part of the forwards' collective responsibilities job and it takes patience and effort to do it well.

The method of starting play after it has been stopped for many minor penalties is a "scrummage." In a "set" or "tight" scrummage, a player from the team awarded the scrummage (usually the scrumhalf) rolls the ball into a tunnel formed by the opposing sets of eight forwards binding together with arms round each others' waists in three rows each and bending forward so that the shoulders of the front row (three men each side) of each team meet.

The forwards from each teams line up across from each other, and bind together in three rows: a rows of three (Positions 1-3), a row of two (Positions 4-5) and another row of three players (Positions 6-8).



**Figure 8: Overhead View of a Scrum**  
(Credit--[http://www.scrum.com/rugby\\_guide/scrums.asp](http://www.scrum.com/rugby_guide/scrums.asp))

On the referee's mark, the two teams "butt heads." This forms the scrum.

Starting on the left side of the scrum, the scrumhalf (Position 9) puts the ball straight into the scrum between the two opposing front rows. The hookers (Position 2) from each team try to win the ball, using their feet to capture and kick the ball back--no hands allowed. The ball is then channeled back to the Number Eight who lets it out to the scrumhalf (who has already moved to the back of the scrum). The scrumhalf passes the ball out to the flyhalf (Position 10) who, along with the other backs (Positions 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15) will implement some play to try to score. A picture of a scrum is at Figure 9.



**Figure 9: Scrum (Dragons v. Peoria)** Notice that the Dragons have caught the ball and have kicked it out of the scrum (bottom left), where the 8 man is picking it off the ground in order to give it to the scrumhalf.

There are many Laws governing a scrum and referees will call a restart if not properly executed. A scrum is serious business. The issue of binding in to scrums, rucks and mauls is very important. Several diagrams to help you get the idea are included at Figures 10 and 11.



**Figure 10: Proper Binding In**  
(Rear View)



**Figure 11: Proper Binding In**  
(Side View)

## LINE OUTS

The other set play unique to rugby is the line-out. A line-out is called if either the ball or ball carrier go in touch. As in soccer, the throw in is done by the nonoffending team, meaning the team that didn't touch the ball before it went in touch.

Two parallel lines of opposing players line up perpendicular to the touch line. The number of players in a line-out is determined by the non-offending team and can consist of two players per team (the thrower and receiver) or as many as 14 players per team.

The player throwing in the ball (usually the hooker) must throw the ball over and between the two rows of opposing players, again supposedly in a straight line. At this point a team may lift a player or two into the air to receive the ball.

Each team has its own signals that indicate where the throw is going. After possession is determined play continues with either a pass out to the backs (who are waiting, oh so patiently, at least 10 meters back) or a charge up the pitch.

As with scrums there are Laws governing line outs, and a referee can call a restart at his/her discretion. Too many restarts and a referee will allow the other team the throw in.



**Figure 12: One Side of a Lineout**  
(Credit--[http://scrum.com/rugby\\_guide/lineouts.asp](http://scrum.com/rugby_guide/lineouts.asp))

If the ball is kicked, carried, or otherwise escorted into touch (“out-of-bounds”), its re-entry onto the field is by a **lineout**.

Here’s how it works: Two rows of forwards standing up (one column per team) line up 5 meters in from the touch line and perpendicular to it. A player from the team who *didn’t* touch it last before it went onto touch gets to throw the ball in, down the tunnel.

The ball can be thrown any distance as long as it flies *straight* between the columns. Like catchers to pitchers in baseball, teams use signals to let their players know where the thrower intends to throw it.

Certain players in the line out (usually the 2nd, 4th, and 6th in line) are designated as **jumpers**. The rest support and protect them in a variety of ways that you will soon be learning. The ball may be thrown beyond the line out or drilled to the first person, but it must travel the initial five meters before it may be played. The line out can extend out to fifteen meters.

During a lineout the backs line up in much the same way as during a scrum, except that where in a scrum they must only remain behind the Number Eight’s or last person's foot in a lineout they (or anyone not participating directly) must remain ten meters back until the lineout is completely



over. Also, no creeping (moving in before the line out is over) or you'll be called and your team penalized.

The thrower from the team not throwing in and both scrumhalves (Position 9) stand where indicated in the diagram (Figure 12). There are many types of line outs, e.g., short line outs, quick line outs, et al. but our discussion of this topic ends here for the moment.



**Figure 13: A Rugby Lineout--7s Style**

### **LOOSE OR OPEN PLAY**

Loose play is all the running and passing which is typically the job of the backs, but be warned, all players will be involved in loose play (for example, forwards are often involved in “rolling mauls” from a lineout). This part of the game receives all the ‘oohs’ and ‘ahhs’ and excited applause from the spectators if done well. So what do you call it if you’re making your happy way down the pitch with the ball and someone (from the opposing team, one hopes) tackles you? D’oh! These are called...

### **BREAKDOWNS IN PLAY**

A breakdown in play takes the form of a ruck, maul or tackle. You're running with the ball and suddenly you're confronted by an opponent who wants to tackle you. What should you do?

You have options:

First of all, try avoidance. Weave, cut and fend him off if necessary. If tackled, try to stay on your feet.

Second, always remember your teammates. They're the guys running behind you, hopefully, screaming "Ball!" "With You!" or your name. This means they're in position and ready to receive the ball.

Once you execute your perfect pass you must position yourself to return the favor. This means slowing down or stopping altogether, whatever is necessary to get behind and in support of the ball carrier. You are no good to anyone if you are in front of the ball carrier.

Okay, so you can't avoid your opponent and no one's screaming for the ball. What now? Again, you have options. Four, in no particular order:

1) You can get up and grab the ball. If in the previous situation both you and the tackler go down then it's a free ball for whoever gets on their feet first or whoever gets to the breakdown first. If there are two tackled players on the ground and the ball is on the ground then it is in open play and therefore may be played from any direction by any player who was on-side at the time of the tackle. A tackled player (or the tackler) may not interfere with anyone on their feet attempting to play the ball until they themselves are on their feet. No one may tackle an opponent with the ball from the ground.

2) You can pass the ball to a teammate immediately upon being tackled. This is a tricky one and we don't recommend it at first. We just thought we'd let you know for future reference.

3) You can form a ruck. You, the ball carrier, go into the tackler in such a way that you go down and are able to place the ball towards your teammates, at which point one or more of your teammates form over you (you're on the ground covering your head if you have any sense) and try to push the opposing player(s) off the ball.

No one can pick up the ball until it comes out beyond the hindmost foot of the hindmost player involved in the ruck. In fact, no one may touch the ball with their hands until such time, just like a scrum. Remember, "Ball's in the muck, it's a ruck." No hands allowed. This is what it looks like:



**Figure 14: Proper Ruck Form**

and a diagram describing the required location of players on the field vis-à-vis the position of a ruck or maul is included at Figure 9.

4) You can form a maul. A maul is the same idea as a ruck except that everyone is on their feet and the ball is in someone's hands. Not all fights for the ball involve being tackled to the ground and a maul is an example of this. The opposing player has his arms wrapped around you and is trying to turn you towards his teammates so they can "strip" the ball from you and continue play. You, of course, are fighting this move, trying to guard the ball and waiting for one of your teammates to come to your aid by either pushing back or stripping the ball for your side.

What makes it a 'maul' is if at least one player from each team is bound in around the guy with the ball. A team can make significant ground by pushing the opposing player(s) down the pitch and all the while you're in the middle wondering when it will all end. It's great fun.

Remember, "The ball's standing tall, it's a maul."

A note about rucks and mauls. All participants must be bound in. For now just remember that you can't just stand there, in fact, if you're not participating you must be behind the hindmost foot of the ruck or maul. In addition, you can only enter a formed ruck or maul from behind the hindmost foot of a player on your side. And, not surprisingly, there's a lot more to it than what's discussed above. Your coaches will have plenty more to say about rucking and mauling.

A diagram visually describing the arrangement of players involved in a ruck or maul is included at Figure 15.



**Figure 15: Arrangement of Players in Rucks and Mauls**  
(Credit--[http://www.scrum.com/rugby\\_guide/ruckmaul.asp](http://www.scrum.com/rugby_guide/ruckmaul.asp))

Rucks and mauls basically give everyone a chance to collect themselves and rally the troops for the next play. In American football speak, it's sort of like a huddle, only the game is still going on while you're planning your next attack.

### **OFFENSE AND DEFENSE**

Rugby is about offense and defense and you'll be doing both interchangeably in quick succession. You've been tackled with the ball, now they have the ball, but they make a crappy pass and your teammate recovers the ball and passes it out to your winger who gets involved in a maul which the opposing team wins...and on and on until the allocated time expires.

It requires quick thinking and an ability to switch modes on a moment's notice. All this comes with experience but for now there are a couple tips that should get you through your first couple practices.

### **OFFENSE OR ATTACK**

For offensive play your team must have possession of the ball. The next steps are to insure your team retains possession and gains ground by running with the ball, passing to a support player and regaining possession after a kick forward. Obviously all this has in mind that by keeping possession of the ball and gaining ground you will eventually score a try.

If a teammate has the ball you are a support player. To be useful you must be behind the ball carrier at all times. If you're not, get there! You'll notice the angled (or wing) formation with the backs spread across the pitch. It's all about being in support and being able to pass the ball backwards to gain ground, as strange as that sounds. Ground is gained by the pass receiver sprinting forward onto the pass. Also a kick may be made into a gap in the opponent's defenses.

Naturally, you don't want your open-side winger running over to support your flyhalf when he has an inside center there doing his job. Clumping up together, even in support of the ball carrier, is not a good idea.

If your opponents get the ball they'll simply run around your little party and score a try. Being a good rugby player requires patience and an ability to react to open play in a decisive manner. Keep all this in mind but also keep in mind that there are plenty of situations where these rules are broken to confuse and avoid the opposition.

Forwards in support—a good rule of thumb is that forwards sprint to where the ball is in open play. They may be in support of each other, advancing the ball up the pitch as a unit, or in support of the backs, but generally need to be where the ball is or to get to where it's going to be.

## **BEWARE THE COUNTERATTACK**

You can't always retain possession of the ball. What happens if an opponent gains possession and begins a counter attack? Every opponent must be marked at all times. That means at least one player on your team has to be keeping an eye on and ready to respond to one player from the opposition team in counter attack. This will not always be your opposite number.

For example, a winger gets involved in a ruck and cannot get out. His opposite number is standing nearby ready to receive the ball in a counter attack unopposed. Someone approaching the maul (say a forward) needs to notice this and cover the opponent winger to make his life a little more difficult. All of this requires an awareness of where the ball is, where your opponents are, where your teammates are and instantaneous decision-making. This only comes with time and experience.

We realize this is all very confusing but if there is only one thing you should take away from this it is: **Support! Support! Support!**

## **DEFENSE**

Defense is about regaining possession of the ball and keeping your opponents from moving up the pitch towards your goal line. Most commonly, we use a man-on-man defense. This means you are responsible for keeping your opposite player from gaining ground if he has the ball. You must mark your man and his position and keep an eye on the ball and move accordingly.

Don't think that guarding one player means your job is done. If the teammate next to you lets the ball carrier through you don't wait around to see what your opposite number is doing. He'll be running after the ball and you should be too. You are basically required to tackle any opponent who has the ball, if possible. This is all about keeping the pressure on and forcing the opposition to pass the ball or form a ruck or maul which with any skill your team will win.

Defense is a completely different subject, but basically there are three types of defense:

- 1) Man-to-man defense, where each player is responsible for guarding one particular guy.
- 2) Zone defense, where each player is responsible for a certain area of the field.

3) Drift defense, where the defensive line shifts as the ball moves out towards the other team's wing.

### **HOW TO SCORE (THAT'S POINTS, SICKOS)**

Many good rugby players have never scored a try. Backs score more often than forwards in rugby, usually by dodging and/or outrunning their opponents, capitalizing upon and moving through gaps in the opposing team's defense.

Forwards, on the other hand, are fond of muscling the ball over the goal line against all odds. Either way it's worth 5 points, that is unless you forget one important thing--you must touch the ball down in a decisive, controlled way.

You can do this by falling on the ball with your upper body as long as you are in control of the ball or, more commonly, you can touch the ball down so you have simultaneous hand-ball-ground contact. Brushing the ball along the ground won't do. Control, downward pressure, and simultaneous hand/ball/ground contact are the key concepts here.

You need to do this because the referee may be halfway across the field and needs to see this in order to whistle the try. If an opponent can keep his hand between the ball and the ground while you're attempting a try it's incomplete.

The priority is to get the ball over and down, but if possible, you want to *place it near the middle*. The reason for this is that after a try, you have a chance to make it 7 points by kicking the ball through the posts (uprights). This is called a **conversion**. Unlike the field goal kick in American football, the kick is made from *any distance back*, but *in line with where the ball was touched down*. It is far easier for a kicker to make a conversion when he is in front of the posts than at an angle.

The kicker may use a **place kick** (where he uses a tee) or a **drop kick** (where he holds the ball with both hands forward, drops the ball, and then kicks it on the rebound).

After a try, the game starts up again with a kick off (a drop kick) to the team who has just scored. (Fun and wonderfully sadistic, eh?) Regardless, it's back to the 50 meter line as quickly as the kicking team can organize itself for the kick off. There is no official game stoppage between the conversion attempt and the ensuing kick off..

The other way to score is by **going for post** (kicking a field goal). This is worth 3 points. Most commonly it is made when a penalty is called within the range of your team's best kicker. It may be place kicked or drop kicked from the point where the penalty was awarded (the mark).

Rarer still in recreational rugby is a spontaneous drop kick through the posts during play. This is allowed at any time but is very difficult to do. Unless you're a retired NFL punter, we don't recommend rookies or even seasoned players do this.

In rugby (thankfully and mercifully) you can't score against your own team. And lucky for that, because you just might find yourself behind your own goal line with the ball.

Let's say an opponent nearing your goal line is facing some fierce defense and decides to kick the ball past your teammates and in-goal. If he gets there and falls on the ball he scores a try.

But, what if you get to ball before he does? What do you do? Simple--you should touch the ball down. But, why?

In this case it's not a try, but a 22 meter drop-out. If the other team is responsible for bringing the ball in-goal and you touch it down then your team gets a kick from anywhere behind the 22 meter line and the other team must retreat immediately to the other side of the 22.

On the other hand, if **your** team is responsible for bringing the ball in-goal and you touch it down, the other team is awarded a 5-meter scrum where their scrumhalf feeds the ball into the scrum. Not exactly the best tactical position, but it's better than allowing the other side to simply go ahead and scoring the try.

Finally, you should never take your eyes off the ball—it can end up behind you literally in the blink of an eye.

## **OFFICIALS AND PENALTIES**

There is only one referee on the pitch during a match and he is the sole judge of what is and is not allowed. If an infraction happens and he doesn't see it, then it didn't happen. With 30 people careening about the pitch one person can't possibly see everything, but you'd be surprised what a good referee can and does see.

If he or she thinks an infraction happened that didn't, then it did. The referee controls the game and sees that the players maintain good conduct and obey the laws of rugby. He or she is also the timekeeper and score keeper. No player may leave or return to the playing field without his or her permission.

There are two touch judges, one appointed by each team. They stand outside the touch line and follow the play. If the ball is kicked out of touch, the touch judge on that side lifts the flag and stands perpendicular to where the ball went out to mark it.

The touch judge does the same thing when a player carrying the ball crosses the touch line on either side of the playing field. The touch judges also determine if a goal kick is successful. However, the referee still has absolute authority and makes the end decision even if both touch judges disagree.

The two teams' coaches are not allowed to influence the team once they are on the field. Thus a captain is appointed for each team. The captain makes plays, encourages and leads the team. This person is the only means of communication between the team and the referee. Players are not allowed to address the referee unless they are called upon.

The only players allowed to speak to the referee are the respective captains of the two playing teams. Even the teams' coaches aren't allowed to talk to the referee. Talking back to the referee in of itself can be penalized at his/her discretion.

Never, ever talk back to a referee. If you have a problem with a call, bring it up with your team's captain. Rugby is built on respect for the rules and those who enforce them. Swearing on the field or talking back to a referee qualifies you for immediate ejection for the game.

Another very good reason the referee deserves your respect is because he/she knows much more about the Laws than you do. If you listen you'll learn a lot about game play and the Laws through simple osmosis.

## **PENALTIES**

A referee will indicate a penalty by blowing his whistle and pointing his or her arm towards the non-offending team, meaning they are awarded the put-in or the kick. His or her arm angled horizontal indicates a scrum-down. His or her arm angled upwards indicates a penalty kick. His or her foot will mark the spot the scrum or the kick is to take place. Either way, you want the referee pointing towards your half of the pitch. In the case of a penalty kick awarded against your team, you and your teammates are required to retire 10 meters behind the mark, and this should be done with dispatch.

A scrum is usually awarded for a minor infraction, most commonly a forward pass or a knock on (where you drop or bump the ball forward with any part of your upper body. If a ruck or maul is showing no progress one way or the other the referee can call for a scrum-down.

The referee may also call a scrum when a ruck or maul goes too long without the ball coming out, or if the referee judges it to be dangerous. There are other occasions for scrums, but we won't cover them here.

Also, it's a good idea to learn some of the signals the referee uses to indicate what he/she is calling. After the whistle the referee will usually give the **mark** with his foot and indicate with his/her arm angled *down* toward one team or the other which team gets to put the ball in. The hookers then usually line up at the mark and the rest of the pack comes in around them.

For a **penalty kick**, the referee extends his arm *upward* toward the team to whom he's awarding it. A penalty kick is awarded for many reasons, including the following:

- 1) Obstruction (blocking someone who doesn't have the ball)
- 2) Being offside
- 3) Using your hands in a ruck
- 4) Playing in a dangerous manner.



A penalty kick is usually awarded at the place the infraction occurs. The referee will give a mark; the kick must be taken through this point.

To execute a penalty kick you must move the ball visibly through the mark with your foot. This could mean anything from a short tap (after which it may be picked up and moved in any legal way) to a long punt (the space directly above the mark counts as the mark).

The opposition must retreat 10 meters immediately when a penalty kick is awarded --giving you quite an advantage. If you ever hear your teammates screaming at you to get "back 10" it is probable that the other team has just been awarded a penalty kick. Remember—Always face the ball.

A free kick is awarded for slightly less secure infractions than a penalty kick (hooker striking too early for the ball, for instance). The difference is that you are not allowed to go for post. The referee indicates a free kick by extending a bent arm toward the team who gets to take it.

What exactly constitutes foul play? Alas, this may be the grayest area of all. Basically, there is a spirit of fair play that governs rugby. With all those people running around, you could do things that aren't nice and not get caught, BUT DON'T DO IT!

These things have a way of escalating in a game as physically intense as rugby and it's also distracting. If something gets out of hand, go to your captain who can speak to the referee. A general rule about retaliation: If someone plays dirty with you, DO NOT RETALIATE. Chances are the referee will only see your retaliatory action, and not what instigated it.

## **SIN BIN AND EJECTION**

The referee is the sole determiner of what constitutes foul play and a good one will keep things clean. Most referees do not put up with dirty play, period.

Dirty play rears its head in many forms. The referee can yellow card a player who repeatedly violates the Law despite receiving warnings from the referee about his/her conduct. This means he's out of the game for five minutes. His team then has to play short for the duration of the five minutes—no substitute allowed.

A player can be given a red card and ejected from a game for the most serious violations of the the Laws or, almost as bad, for talking back to or cursing at the referee. Should this happen, the red carded player's team can't bring in a substitute and has to play short for the rest of the game.

Finally, if you want to immerse yourself in the Laws in their totality you can access the current, unabridged version of them at <http://www.irb.com/Laws/Regulations/home.htm>

## **CONDITIONING AND FITNESS**

Rugby is a strenuous and demanding sport, both physically and mentally. Becoming a successful rugby player depends on a combination of skill and the ability to perform both physically and mentally for the duration of the match.

How well you do so depends on your level of fitness. Playing skills develop with practice and experience, but you'll find that your playing skills develop more quickly if you're more fit--if you can't keep up with your teammates during drills, you won't be able to keep up on the pitch during a match; if you're not strong enough to tackle someone in practice, you'll never strip a ball from an opposing player or set up a maul during a match.

And, let's face it, it's hard to focus to concentrate on things in practice, much less try to keep up with things on the pitch if you're exhausted and holding on by your fingernails.

Also, bear in mind that most competitive teams deliberately pick up the pace of the game during the last 10 minutes of each half to exploit any flaw in the opposing team's fitness. You may learn individual and team skills well in practice but if you're not sufficiently fit these skills can, do and will break down during the match.

Running laps isn't fun, but running around on the pitch during a match definitely is. When you can run well on the track for eighty minutes you'll not only play better but you'll have a **LOT** more fun when you're actually playing the game.

To give you some idea of the physical demands rugby makes on its players, in an average 80 minute rugby game:

- The ball is in loose play approximately 40 minutes.
- "Play" is made up of 100-150 discrete physical activities (not sure what this means).
- Recovery time between activities averages less than 40 seconds.
- Forwards spend 50% of their time in scrums and lineouts, the rest in support.
- Forwards run 4-6 miles during a game, primarily in support work. They require more endurance work.
- Backs run 4-5 miles in a game, 30% of which is sprinting (primarily on attack), the rest walking and jogging into position for continuity. They require more speed work.<sup>1</sup>

There are several aspects of fitness a rugby player needs to master (or at least constantly improve upon) in order to play at his/her best

- 1) **Endurance**—The most important thing in rugby. Eighty minutes can seem like an eternity (an eternity in hell, even), or it can pass in a moment, depending on your wind.

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<sup>1</sup>D.A. McLean, *Analysis of the Physical Demands of International Rugby Union* J. SPORTS SCI.(June 10, 2003, pp.285-296)

- 2) **Strength** (explosive and sustained)--Strength is important for all players, but especially so for forwards, because they are involved in all scrums and lineouts, as well as most of the rucks and mauls.
- 3) **Flexibility**--Flexibility allows you to achieve your other fitness goals more easily and helps make your body more resistant to injury, both in practice and during matches.
- 4) **Speed**--Required in the backs and encouraged in the forwards. Getting to the breakdown in play (*i.e.*, rucks and mauls) and running the ball up the pitch are integral to maintaining possession, advancing the ball and putting points on the board.
- 5) **Mental sharpness and toughness**--Often underestimated, but once you have this it's what allows you to excel at rugby. Mental sharpness is developed by learning individual and team skills and through practice being able to perform them at high speed without conscious thought. Mental toughness is developed by undergoing physical adversity and working/playing/bulling your way through it.

Mental toughness will keep you in the game when it's not fun to be out there anymore--someone stepped on you with cleats, you're banged up, your body hurts, you're limping, there's sweat/mud/blood in your eyes, you're ready to fall over...but you're only one try from taking the lead with three minutes left in the game, your team is five meters from the opposing team's try line and your teammates **NEED** you.

However, your individual level of fitness is primarily your responsibility. Participating in practices will help you become fitter, but by itself it will not bring you to a level of fitness which allows an optimal level of play on the field. As time goes on, this will prove frustrating because your performance as a player will plateau, and may show a marked divergence vis-à-vis your improving playing skills. In the end, it's up to you to do the extra work needed to close that gap.

If you're working with a trainer, tell him/her that you are playing rugby and change your regimen accordingly. Also, consult your coach(es) for additional ideas; many teams schedule optional fitness enhancement sessions separate from practice for folks who may need extra work and some support.

### **THE THIRD HALF**

Unlike many sports, rugby teams have a very strong tradition of hospitality to other teams. In fact, the team which hosts a match is obligated to host a party afterwards for both teams.

So, oddly enough, shortly after the match the folks you just spent eighty minutes bashing on the field become your drinking buddies and fellow buffet robbers. You talk, swap stories, get to know each other, and, eventually, someone bursts out into song.

Rugby songs usually bawdy, often profane, sometimes blasphemous, (usually) howlingly funny, you probably wouldn't/couldn't sing them in good conscience in front of your parents, forget your grandparents.

The most extensive archive of rugby song lyrics on the web is at <http://www.rugbysongs.net>, although you'll have to pay a nominal fee to access all of their content. Peruse at the risk of individual moral indignation and continual blushing.

There are other third-half traditions, but we'll let you find out about them yourself--your team probably has more than a few of its own.

**Warning:** While singing any rugby song if it is determined that you have slurred, mispronounced words, stuttered or repeated an inappropriate verse/refrain, you may be required to "shoot the boot."

**Shooting the boot is a time-honored rugby tradition where the offender must drink a respectable quantity of beer rapidly and in a timely fashion from the first proffered shoe (preferably a rugby boot) that can hold said liquid.**

Three representative selections are included for your enjoyment. If you're easily offended, stop reading here. I mean it. I really mean it. Okay, but don't say I didn't warn you...

## **Chicago**

CHORUS:

I used to work in Chicago, in an old department store  
I used to work in Chicago, but I don't work there anymore

SINGER: A woman came in for some velvet

ALL: Some velvet from the store?

SINGER: Velvet she wanted, felt she got!

ALL: Oh, I don't work there anymore!

It follows this pattern for all the verses; there must be at least a thousand of them.

Sample verses include:

A computer she wanted, my wang she got;  
A computer she wanted, my hard drive she got;  
A board she wanted, nailed she got;  
A nail she wanted, a screw she got;  
Carpet she wanted, shag she got;  
A fishing rod she wanted, my pole she got;  
Jewelry she wanted, a pearl necklace she got;  
Camels she wanted, humped she got;  
A screen door she wanted, slammed she got;  
A screen door she wanted, the back door she got;  
Paper she wanted, a ream she got;  
A good deal she wanted, fucked she got;  
A cucumber she wanted, my pickle she got;  
A ruler she wanted, twelve inches she got;  
A pizza she wanted, a backdoor delivery she got;  
A hammer she wanted, nailed she got;  
An application she wanted, filled out she got;

You get the idea...Have fun, be creative, make up your own verses.

## Marrying Kind

*Soloist volunteer for each verse is selected during the previous verse by raising his/her hand and is chosen by the group, which collectively points at the next person who gets to sing a solo verse, indicated in regular capital and lowercase text. Everyone sings words in capital letters.*

IF I WERE THE MARRYING KIND,  
I'D THANK THE LORD I'M NOT SIR,  
THE KIND OF MAN THAT I WOULD BE  
WOULD BE A RUGBY...

Prop, sir.  
Prop, sir?

'Cause I'd support a hooker  
And you'd support a hooker  
WE'D ALL SUPPORT A HOOKER TOGETHER  
WE'D BE ALRIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT  
SUPPORTING HOOKERS TOGETHER

(The following verses change "prop" with the first line  
and "support a hooker" with the second line)

2nd row Sniff butt	Scrum half Put it in	Halftime orange Get sucked
Spectator on a rainy day Come in rubbers	Goal post Stand erect	Grounds keeper #1 Trim bush
Spectator on a sunny day Come again	Rugby rulebook Get violated	Grounds keeper #2 Do lines
Cleat Get screwed	Ball Pumped	Whistle Blown

This madness continues until the group's collective creativity (or depravity, depending on how you look at it) runs dry.

## Yogi

*Soloist volunteer for each verse during the previous by raising his/her hand (or placing his/her beer on his/her head) and are chosen by the group pointing their elbows at him/her. Everyone sings words in capital letters; the soloist sings the words in capital and lower case lettering.*

I know a bear that you all know,  
Yogi, YOGI,  
I know a bear that you all know,  
Yogi, Yogi Bear.  
YOGI, YOGI BEAR,  
YOGI, YOGI BEAR,  
I KNOW A BEAR THAT YOU ALL KNOW,  
YOGI, YOGI BEAR.

Yogi's got a little friend,  
Booboo, BOOBOO,  
Yogi's got a little friend,  
Booboo, Booboo Bear.  
BOOBOO, BOOBOO BEAR,  
BOOBOO, BOOBOO BEAR,  
YOGI'S GOT A LITTLE FRIEND,  
BOOBOO, BOOBOO BEAR.

*And similarly:*

Yogi's got a girlfriend, Suzi,  
Suzi, Suzi Bear.

Yogi's got an enemy, Ranger  
Ranger, Ranger Smith.

Yogi's got a cheesy knob, cammum,  
Cammum, Camembert.

Suzi likes it on the fridge, polar,  
Polar, polar bear.

Booboo likes it up the arse, brown,  
Brown, brown bear.

Suzi hates it up the arse, something,  
Something she cant bear.

Yogi's dick is long and green, cucum,  
Cucum, cucumbe[a]r.

Suzi likes to shave her pubes, grizzly,  
Grizzly, grizzly bear.

Etc., etc., etc., until the group runs out of verses.

## **GLOSSARY OF RUGBY TERMS AND PHRASES**

**ADVANTAGE**--A method of refereeing. The referee allows the game to proceed uninterrupted as long as the ball is in play and there are no major infractions. Play can continue after an infraction if the non-offending team gains an advantage.

**ADVANTAGE LINE**--An imaginary line that extends across the field from where the last scrum, ruck, maul, lineout or play the ball was formed. This is used as a measure of how much good has been done.

**AGAINST THE FEED**--Used to describe the extremely rare occurrence of the team losing the ball to the opposition after feeding it into the scrum. Should never, ever happen, but has been known to.

**ATTACKING RUGBY**--An expression used to describe the brand of rugby that a team plays. It usually involves keeping the ball alive for as long as possible and using the whole team in phase after phase of play. The theory says that if you keep the ball alive long enough holes will appear in the opposition defence.

**BACK ROW MOVE**--The back row are the loose forwards of a team. A back row move consists of the loosies working in tandem from a scrum. One of them picks the ball up (usually the number 8) and backs into one flanker and tries to unload to the other flanker. However this always seems to result in the referee pinging them for accidental offside so I can't understand why teams do this.

**BACKS**--The group of players normally numbered 9 through 15 who do not participate in scrums and lineouts, except for the scrumhalf.

**"BALL'S OUT!"**--Of the scrum, that is. You can stop kicking, hitting, biting and shoving now.

**BINDING**--The careful method players grip and grasp each other to form a secure scrum, ruck, or maul. This is a critical skill to ensure the safety of players.

**BLIND SIDE**--From scrums, rucks and mauls the shortest side to the touch line is known as the blind side. Most teams always seem to "work the blind" every time they try an attacking move. Also called the weak side.

**BOMB**--A high kick into the air designed to usually put pressure on the opposition fullback. This pressure comes from the chasers who try to recover the ball or at least take out the fullback. In rugby the ideal bomb should land just outside the 22m line to prevent the "mark" being taken. In league it should land just outside the goal line.

**BREAKAWAY**--Either of the two forwards wearing No. 6 or No. 7. Also called wing forwards or breakaways, they bind to the scrum outside of the locks just behind the outside hip of the props. They can play always on the same side of the scrum or can specialize on either the weakside or strongside. The players with the fewest set responsibilities, their job is to aggressively pursue the ball, gain possession, and take off running. Also known as flankers.

**BREAKDOWN**--Where play momentarily halts, e.g., at a collapsed maul or a ruck.

**BULLOCKING**--Pronounced 'bollocking' by most commentators and with usually the same effect, a bullocking run is usually made by a forward with the ball in hand, scattering tacklers as he goes.

**BUST**--When a player is able to break a tackle and find themselves in open territory he is said to have made a bust.



**CAPTAIN**--The player selected to guide a team on the pitch during a match.

**CATCH-UP FOOTIE**--When one team is behind by a large amount of points they usually get desperate and resort to a different game plan. This really only happens in the last 20 minutes of a game. This tactic is known as catch-up footie and is characterized by spinning the ball wide at every chance (i.e., no continuous cut backs) , taking the tap on penalties (instead of shooting for goal) and trying to unload miracle balls all the time. This brand of rugby/league is highly dangerous as it usually leads to coughs, intercepts and the loss of 2 or 3 easy points at each penalty. Therefore it is only recommended in hopeless situations.

**CAUGHT NAPPING**--Refers to the defense being unaware of what is happening and thus unable to defend properly.

**CENTER**--Either of the the backs wearing No. 12 (inside) or No. 13 (outside). Powerful runners who are the heart of the back running attack and defense. The inside centre can also be called the 2nd 5/8th.

**CHANGING THE ANGLES**--When a player comes into the backline at a different line to the rest of the backline he is said to be changing the angles. This has the effect of disrupting the opposition defensive patterns in the hope of making a bust. However this can result in the player coughing up the ball. Used most effectively against sliding defenses.

**CHARGE DOWN**--The blocking of a kick by an opposition's player.

**CHEAP METERS**--When the ball carrier makes ground up the field because of ineffective or non-existent tackling then they are said to have made cheap meters.

**CHEATING**--When a player knowingly infringes he is said to be cheating. If the ref spots it a penalty will be conceded, but if you get away with it, it's a good tactic. And, remember this "It ain't cheating if you don't get caught" (joke).

**CHIP KICK**--The same as a pop kick; a short shallow kick, normally performed by the center, usually delivered over the head of an onrushing defender to be quickly retrieved or caught by the kicker or one of his/her supporting players

**CLEAN**--A player who never resorts to cheating or dirty play is known as a clean player. The complete opposite of filthy.

**CLEANED OUT**--A term used to describe a team that is not winning any ball in the lineouts and are therefore forced to feed off the crumbs.

**CLEARANCE KICK**--A kick of the ball to touch which relieves pressure on a side under heavy attack by the opposition.

**COLLAPSING THE SCRUM**--When a scrum goes to ground (i.e., the front rows hit the deck) it is said to have collapsed. The reasons for this happening are many and varied, not even the referee necessarily knows why. If a team has in the eyes of the referee deliberately collapsed a scrum in order to prevent a push-over, a penalty try may be awarded.

**CONCEDING THE PENALTY**--A good professional team will deliberately concede a penalty in order to prevent a try being scored. Other teams with really stupid hot-headed players will concede penalties just for the fun of it. A penalty can be purposely conceded by some of the following methods:

1) Doing a superman impression by diving in over the top in a ruck.

- 2) Being blatantly offside at ruck, maul and scrum time.
- 3) Collapsing the scrum.
- 4) Punching or kicking someone right in front of the referee. This tends to be especially annoying if your team has just been awarded a penalty and the referee reverses it.
- 5) Not releasing the ball in a tackle situation.
- 6) Not allowing the tackled player to release the ball by lying all over them.
- 7) Stripping the ball in the tackle in front of the referee.
- 8) Bad mouthing or talking back to the referee.

All good teams these days have specialists at giving away silly penalties and they are usually found in the front row of a team.

**CONVERSION KICK**--A kick at the posts after the awarding of a try scoring two points if successful. The kick must be attempted directly from a spot perpendicular to the spot where the try was awarded. Usually taken with a place kick, it can be rushed when the kicker makes a move towards the ball. If taken as a drop kick it is uncontested.

**COUGH**--The act of losing the ball forward for no apparent reason.

**CRUMBS**--A term used to describe not good quality ball that a team "feeds" off, such as loose ball at line out time.

**CUT BACK**--The act of bringing the ball closer to the forwards after the ball has been released from the ruck, instead of passing it out to the wing. This is achieved by picking out the closest opposition forwards and charging straight towards them. As a result, many tries are bombed, because passing it to the wings scores tries.

**DECK**--(i) Another term for the ground or playing surface; (ii) Can also be used as a verb in order to describe somebody thumping an opponent to the ground.

**DONE GOOD**--Where a player has performed some good deed-placed a ball well in the tackle, has made a good tackle, a good kick upfield, or has made hard meters.

**DONE PLENTY OF GOOD**--As above, but the action results in points being scored. Includes making a critical pass, kick, or intercept. Also can be used when a player has "done good" throughout an entire game.

**DROP GOAL**--A kick at the posts taken at anytime a side is close to their own try line. If successful it scores three points but the ball must hit the ground before being kicked.

**DROP KICK**--A kick technique where the ball is dropped to the ground and as it bounces back up it is kicked.

**DUMMY**--A technique where one pretends to pass the ball.

**EASY METERS**--See cheap meters.

**ELLIS, WILLIAM WEBB**--The person who while as a student at Rugby School is credited with inspiring the modern game of rugby football in 1823. He later became a priest and passed away in Southern France.

**ENGINE ROOM**--Another name for the two locks of a team, especially in reference to scrums.

**EVER-PRESENT**--Refers to a player, usually the open side flanker, who is always "on" the ball carrier. This can only be achieved through being constantly offside all game.

**FEED**--The rolling of the ball into the scrum by the scrumhalf. Must be straight down the tunnel.

**FIFTEENS**--The name of the most common game of rugby union featuring fifteen total players per side. Each team consists of 8 forwards and 7 backs playing two halves each 40 minutes long.

**FILTHY**--A player who continuously infringes, throws punches, stomps and pokes opposition players in the eye is called filthy.

**FIRST 5/8TH**--The back wearing No. 10 who normally receives the ball from the scrumhalf. Also called the Outhalf, Outside half or 1st 5/8th, he/she will call plays for the backline, pass the ball to other backs and/or provide most of the tactical kicks (See Flyhalf).

**FLANKER**--Either of the two forwards wearing No. 6 or No. 7. Also called wing forwards or breakaways, they bind to the scrum outside of the locks just behind the outside hip of the props. They can play always on the same side of the scrum or can specialize on either the weakside or strongside. The players with the fewest set responsibilities, their job is to aggressively pursue the ball, gain possession, and take off running. Also known as Breakaway Forward.

**FLAT**--When the defending backline are close to the off side line they are said to be standing up flat. There tends to be a very fine line between being flat and offside; many referees will tend to penalize sides they feel are playing too close to this line.

**FLAT-FOOTED**--A player who is stationary when the opposition is moving towards him at a rapid rate is said to be flat footed.

**FLYHALF**--The back wearing No. 10 who normally receives the ball from the scrumhalf. Also called the Outhalf, Outside half or 1st 5/8th, he/she will call plays for the backline, pass the ball to other backs, or provide most of the tactical kicks (See First 5/8th).

**FOOT UP**--An offense where a hooker brings his foot into the scrum's tunnel before the ball is fed by the scrumhalf.

**FORWARD PASS**--An illegal pass to a player ahead of the ball causing the ball to be awarded to the other team in a scrum.

**FORWARDS**--The group of players normally numbered 1 through 8 who bind together into scrums, lineup for lineouts, and commit themselves to most rucks and mauls.

**FREE KICK**--A uncontested kick awarded to a team usually for a minor penalty by the other team. Can be taken as a place kick, drop kick, or, if no score is attempted, a punt. The kick cannot be taken directly at the posts except by a drop goal.

**FRINGE**--A player who is close to being deemed off side is known to play on the fringes. This normally applies during rucks and mauls. A good open side flanker will play on the fringes the whole game.

**FRONT FIVE**--A common name for all of the front (props and hooker) and second row (locks) forwards. Also known as the Tight Five.

**FRONT ROW**--The common name for the Prop/Hooker/Prop arrangement at the front of a scrum.

**FULLBACK**--The back wearing No. 15 who normally plays deep behind the backline. In offense the fullback is a dangerous attacking position hitting holes unexpectedly at pace, in defense the fullback has primary responsibility for covering the opposition's downfield tactical kicks.

**GARRY OWEN**--A tactical kick which is popped very high and shallow allowing the kicker and supporting players to easily run underneath it for recovery. The kick is intended to put heavy pressure on any opposition player attempting to catch the ball. Also known as a High Ball or an Up and Under.

**GO THE DISTANCE**--Refers to players and their ability to last the full 80 minutes.

**"GOOD GAME!"**--What is automatically said to members of the opposing side at the conclusion of the match. Whether or not it was a *satisfactory* game is another matter entirely.

**GOT THE WOOD ON**--A term used to describe a team which has the ability to push the opposition backwards

**GRUBBER**--A kick of the ball which cause the ball to bounce and roll along the ground.

**HALFBACK**--The back wearing No. 9 who normally feeds the ball into a scrum and retrieves the ball at the base of scrums, rucks, and mauls. Can also be called the Scrumhalf.

**HIGH BALL**--A ball kicked very high into the air placing any player attempting to catch it under extreme pressure by on rushing opposition players. Also known as a Garryown or an Up and Under.

**HOOKER**--The frontrow forward wearing No. 2. The player supported on either side in the scrum by props who gains possession of the ball by hooking or blocking the ball with one of his/her feet. The hooker is also normally the forward who throws the ball into the lineout.

**INJURY TIME**--During a half, the clock is stopped by the referee while any injury is attended to. After the normal half's time has expired the continued play afterwards equal to the amount of injury stoppage is called injury time.

**INSIDE CENTER**--The back wearing No. 12 (See Centers).

**IRFB**--The International Rugby Football Board. The IRFB is the ruling body for Rugby Union worldwide and has primary responsibility for setting and adjusting the laws of the sport and running the Rugby World Cup championships for 15s and 7s every four years.

**JUMPER**--A common name for a rugby jersey. Also the name of a player in a lineout, usually at the 2, 4 and 6 positions, who jumps to catch or intercept the throw.

**HE ONLY KNOWS ONE WAY**--Refers to player who lacks foresight, or lacks the ability to pass the ball. Players who only know one way simply go forward all game all day, into or through as many opposition players as possible.

**HIGH TACKLE**--A tackle that comes into contact above the shoulders of the victim is known as high. This practice is dangerous and usually results in a penalty.

**HIGH-STEP**--A way of running when someone tries to tackle you. Normally the defender ends up with stitches.

**HIT IT UP**--A rugby league term meaning when short of intelligent ideas (i.e., most of the game) charge forward in the hope of causing a bust in the opposing team's defense.

**HOIK**--A verb describing when a rugger jams a finger into one nostril and forcibly sends air out the other, clearing the nasal passage of debris and providing people standing on the sidelines with a true Kodak moment.

**HOOF**--Kicking downfield for tactical position.

**HOSPITAL PASS**--A stupid pass by a player that puts the receiver in immediate danger of being tackled. The receiver usually gets some treatment upon being put on the deck (See Deck, Treatment).

**HOW'S YOUR FATHER**--A term used whenever a player loses his temper and shows it. It is mostly used when a player pushes an opponent or tries to deck him.

**HRK**--The noise a player makes when being high tackled.

**INTERCEPT**--When a player fires a pass that is taken by an opposition player it is said to be intercepted. This can quite often result in the scoring of a try known as an "intercept try".

**"IT AIN'T A ROUND BALL"**--A defensive statement that explains why you didn't catch that wildly bouncing ball. Or, after a loss, an attempt to explain the ways of that bitch goddess Fortuna. Or, an attempt to explain life itself. Former Japanese Prime Minister and rugger Yoshiro Mori once said: "Life is like a rugby ball. You never know in what direction it will bounce next."

**KNOCK ON**--Losing, dropping, or knocking the ball forward from a player's hand resulting in the ball being awarded to the other team in a scrum.

**KNOCK FORWARD**--Same as Knock On.

**LATE TACKLE**--A term used to describe a tackle on a player after he has gotten rid of the ball.

**LEADING FROM THE FRONT**--Refers to the team's captain, if he/she is a forward, involves making hard meters, doing good, putting players on the deck (preferably by tackling), and making plenty of busts (See Hard Meters, Done Good, Deck, Bust).

**LEAGUE**--A version of rugby played normally with 13 players in accordance different Laws than Rugby Union. The two codes deviated over professionalism and are usually contentious towards each other.

**LIFTING**--The act of lifting the lineout jumper into the air in order to more easily catch or intercept the throw.

**LINEOUT**--A play where two single file lines are formed by both teams after the ball goes out of touch. This involves the two opposing forward packs to line up parallel next to one another. They should be standing about 1 meter apart. The hooker of the team who didn't put the ball out (unless it went out from a penalty) gets to throw it in to the lineout. Before the ball is even released the gap in the lineout should be immediately closed up.

Once thrown in every player should have a go at getting the ball by leaping in the air, jumping across to the other side, jumping off the shoulders of the opposition, lifting, using the outside arm or by any other method which the referee does not penalize for cheating.

**LOCK**--Either of the two forwards normally wearing No. 4 or No. 5. Typically the largest players on the field, they have primary responsibility for being the power in scrums and securing the ball in lineouts. Due to their size, they are also normally powerful forces in all loose play, rucks, and mauls. Also known as the Second Row.

**LOOSEHEAD**--The No. 1 prop in a scrum due to his head being outside the opposition's tighthead prop's shoulders (See Prop).

**LOOSE FORWARDS**--Common names for the flankers and No. 8 in the pack/scrum.

**MARK**--i) A location on the pitch designated by the referee as the location a scrum should come together; ii) A word a player will call while catching a kicked ball within his own 22 meter line. If awarded by the referee, that back is awarded a free kick; iii) In rugby a player that catches a kick, such as a bomb, in his own 22-meter zone may claim the fair catch or mark; iv) Place indicated by the referee play is to continue upon calling the ball out of bounds or after assessing a penalty.

**MAUL**--Typically after a runner has come into contact and the ball is still being held by a player once any combination of at least three players have bound themselves a maul has been set. The primary difference from a ruck is that the ball is not on the ground.

**MEN TO BURN**--The situation where there are more men from the ball carrier's team outside of him than from the opposition team. Very similar to Overload.

**MILKING**--A player who pretends to be interfered with in the play of the ball in order to solicit a penalty call from the referee against the opposition.

**MISS OUT PASS**--In a regular backline movement a pass that goes wider out than the next player is termed a miss out pass. More than one player can be missed out at a time. This type of passing is usually very disastrous because it leads to intercepts and the wastage of good overloads (See Overload, Intercept).

**NUMBER 8**--The forward who wears the jersey with the No. 8. This player binds into the scrum normally at the very base between the two locks. His/her responsibility is to initiate attacks by the forwards from scrums or to provide a stable transition of the ball from the scrum to the scrumhalf.

**OBSTRUCTION**--Also called blocking. Where a player gets in the way of an opponent who is not carrying the ball. This results in a penalty.

**OFFSIDES**--A penalizable offense when a player is in front of the ball when it was played last by a team member. In rugby a player must be behind the hindmost foot in a ruck or maul in order to be onside. A penalty occurs if a player is offside and obstructs an opponent, plays the ball or is within 10 meters of an opponent playing the ball.

**ONSLAUGHT**--A period of play where one team constantly attacks the opposition's goal line for several phases of play. Usually, an onslaught provides few points as the necessary speed of play means that a cough is likely and turnover inevitable, especially considering that only a weak team could spend so long on the goal line without doing any good (See Cough, Done Good, Turnover).

**OUT OF POSITION**--In rugby and league, players are assigned positions of where they should play, i.e., a winger should be on the end of a backline. When a player is expected to be in their normal position on the field but are actually somewhere else they are said to be out of position. Being caught out of position in defense will usually lead to the concession of tries.

**OUTHALF/OUTSIDE HALF**--The back wearing No. 10 who normally receives the ball from the scrumhalf. Also called the Outhalf, Outside half or 1st 5/8th, he/she will call plays for the backline, pass the ball to other backs, or provide most of the tactical kicks. Also known as Flyhalf.

**OUTSIDE CENTER**--The back wearing No. 13 (See Center).

**OVER THE TOP**--When a ruck has formed and players from one team dive across off their feet onto the other side in order to prevent the ball from being cleared they are said to be going over the top. This is a penalizable offense.

**OVERLOAD**--An overload occurs when the attacking side has more men in the backline than the defending side has. This can be caused by the fullback coming into the backline or by defending players being caught out of position

**PACK**--Another name for all the forwards (Positions 1-8) when they are bound for a scrum.

**PENALTY**--Any number of infractions or violations which award the other team a kick or other consideration by the referee.

**PENALTY KICK**--An uncontested kick awarded to a team for a major infraction by the other team. The kick can be taken directly at goal and scores 3 points if successful. If the ball is kicked to touch, then the ball is awarded back to the team which kicked the ball out of bounds.

**PENALTY TRY**--The awarding of a try due to a flagrant violation by an opposing side that prevents an obvious try from being scored.

**PITCH**--The field upon which a rugby match is played.

**PLACE KICK**--A kick of the ball resting on the ground, placed in an indentation in the ground, from a small pile of sand, or (usually) from a kicking tee. Place kicks are used to start each half, for penalty kicks at goal, or for conversion kicks after a try has been awarded.

**PLAYING IT AT PACE**--A team with poor quality forwards will often try to play the game at pace; this involves taking quick taps, quick throw-ins and fast drop-outs.

**POP KICK**--A little kick into the air designed only to get over the head of the defending player directly in front of the kicker.

**PROP**--Either of the two forwards normally wearing No. 1 (loosehead) or No. 3 (tighthead). Responsibilities are to support the hooker during scrums and 2nd rows during lineouts.

**PUNT KICK**--A kick technique where the ball is dropped and kicked before it touches the ground.

**PUSH-OVER**--(i) Weak opposition is said to be a push-over if they offer little or no resistance; (ii) A try scored from a set scrum near to the line. The attacking team attempts to drive the opposition over the goal-line, with the Number 8 picking up the ball and attempting to score the try. Can quite often result in a cough in the attempt to get the ball down over the line. Very hard to stop if the opposition has a "got the wood on" you (See scrum, cough, got the wood on).

**PUSHOVER TRY**--A try scored by the forward pack as a unit in a scrumdown by pushing the opposition's scrum pack backwards across the try line while dragging the ball underneath them. Typically scored from a 5 meter scrum, the try is usually awarded when the No. 8 or scrumhalf touch the ball down after it crosses the try line.

**QUALITY BALL**--Ball fed tidily to the halfback from mauls, rucks, lineouts or scrums for delivery to the backs is quality ball. Only teams with good forwards are guaranteed of gaining quality ball. Teams without good forwards are forced to feed off the crumbs (See Crumbs).

**QUICKIE**--\*NOT\* what you might think--has nothing to do with rugby groupies or cheerleaders! A quick throw-in. Usually taken when (i) there are no opposition players nearby when you have the ball; (ii) there are, but they are cleaning you out horribly, because...

**RAKING**—See Stomping.

**REFEREE**--The sole judge and timekeeper in a rugby match.

**RESTART**--The kick restarting play after a half or after points are scored.

**ROLLING MAUL**--A maul that actually moves is deemed to be a rolling maul. It is a good method of making hard yards and putting the crowd to sleep (See Hard Meters, Maul ).

**RUCK**--Typically after a runner has come into contact and the ball has been delivered to the ground once any combination of at least three players have bound themselves a ruck has been set. The primary difference from a maul is that the ball is on the ground.

**RUGGER**--Colloquial name for a rugby player.

**RUCKING**--Rucking involves using the boot in order to free the ball from a ruck. However this use of the boot can get over vigorous and turn into stomping (See Stomping, Ruck).

**RUN IT AT 'EM**--A team who is desperate to score big points will run it at 'em by always electing not to kick the ball. This is a symptom of Catch Up Footie and Attacking Rugby (See Catch Up Footie, Attacking Rugby).

**SCRUM**--The formation used in the setplay restarting play after a knock on or forward pass. The forwards from each side bind together and then the two packs come together to allow the scrumhalf with the feed to deliver the ball to the scrum. A scrum can also be awarded or chosen in different circumstances by the referee.

**SCRUMDOWN**--The coming together of the scrum.

**SCRUMHALF**--The back wearing No. 9 who normally feeds the ball into a scrum and retrieves the ball at the base of scrums, rucks, and mauls. Can also be called the Halfback.

**SCRUMMAGING**--The process of setting and completing a scrum

**SECOND 5/8TH**--Either of the the backs wearing No. 12 (inside) or No. 13 (outside). Powerful runners, they are the heart of the back running attack and defense.

**SEND OFF**--After a particularly malicious foul or numerous individual fouls the referee can elect to expel a player from the match. The player cannot be replaced causing the side to play one person short. Normally the sent off player is banned for at least one match after the sendoff and depending on the severity of the offense can be banned for more than one match up to life, depending on the league this occurs in and that league's rules.

**SECOND ROW**--Either of the two forwards normally wearing No. 4 and No. 5. Typically the largest players on the field, they have primary responsibility for being the power in scrums and securing the ball in lineouts. Due to their size, they are also normally powerful forces in all loose play, rucks, and mauls. Also known as the Locks.

**SET PIECES**--Formal, organized methods of introducing the ball into play which distinguish rugby from other sports, most notably the kickoff, the scrum and the lineout (See Kickoff, Scrum and Lineout).



**SEVENS (aka 7s)**--A form of rugby union invented in Scotland and played with only seven total players, usually three forwards and four backs. Each half typically last only 7 minutes but can be longer. Games are almost always played during tournaments.

**SIN BIN**--Where a player has to cool his heels for acting as if rugby is sanctioned by World Wrestling Entertainment or just some sort of soccer riot.

**SIR**--What players call the referee at all times.

**SIXES AND SEVENS**--Occurs as a result of being split wide open; result is that the defensive patterns are not set and thus the attacking side has a great chance to score tries.

**SKIP PASS**--See Miss Out Pass.

**SLAUGHTER**--What happens when a good team encounters a useless team and makes them wish they had stayed home.

**SLIDING DEFENSE**--A defensive pattern used by a team which involves the defense running across field to make the tackles. The backs start close in to the scrum and move out towards the attackers.

**SPILL**--Differs from a cough in that the ball tends to just fall forward rather than actually being "coughed" forward (See Cough).

**STEAL METERS**--(i) The act gaining ground while the opposition is not ready. Very similar to cheap meters because not a hand is laid on the ball carrier. This is quite often achieved when a game is being played at pace; (ii) A form of cheating where a player always takes at least 2 steps forward from where a penalty, mark or the play the ball should be taken (See Cheap Meters, Cheating, Playing at Pace).

**STEAL THE BALL**--See Strip.

**STOMPING**--When rucking gets dangerous, i.e., if a boot is being raked across the head of another player, it is called stomping. This is way of hurting opposition players and conceding penalties. A player who does this is called filthy (See Rucking, Conceding the Penalty, Filthy, Treatment).

**STRIP**--A term used in Rugby league to describe the illegal process of ripping the ball away from the person who is playing the ball. Usually carried out in front of the referee so that the offending player is penalized. This a very good way of conceding an unnecessary penalty (See Conceding the Penalty).

**TAKE**--A well executed catch of a kicked ball.

**TENS**--A form of rugby union played with only ten total players. Each half typically last only 10 minutes but can be longer. Games are almost always played during tournaments.

**TIGHT FIVE**--A common name for all of the front (Props and Hooker) and second row (Locks) forwards. Also known as the Front Five

**TIGHTHEAD**--The No. 3 prop in a scrum due to his head being between the opposition's hooker and loosehead prop's shoulders. A scrum can also win a tighthead by taking possession of the ball in a scrum fed by the other pack.

**TOUCH, TOUCHLINE**--The out of bounds line that runs on either side of the pitch. The non-contact version of rugby is also commonly called touch.

**TOUCH JUDGE**--An official posted on each side of the pitch to mark the spot where balls go out of touch and to judge kicks at goal. The touch judge is also instrumental in pointing out any serious violence infractions not seen by the referee.

**TRY**--A score of 5 points awarded when the ball is carried or kicked across the tryline and touched down to the ground by a player.

**TRYLINE**--The goal line extending across the pitch.

**TAKE OUT**--When a player is effected in such a way that he can not participate in the current passage of play he is said to be taken out. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways:

- 1) The pokai method.
  - 2) Putting them on the deck.
  - 3) Giving them an illegal high shot.
  - 4) Holding a player down in the lineout.
  - 5) Holding a faster player back in a race to the loose ball.
  - 6) Over vigorous use of the boot and not just at ruck time.
- (See Deck, Stomping, Treatment )

**TAKING THE TAP**--Instead of shooting for goal, a team may elect to take the tap after being awarded a penalty. This is done as soon as the penalty is awarded so as to try and catch the opposition within the 10 meter area and gain another penalty for offside play. Can be quite effective against teams with big slow forwards. Teams that play the game at pace usually use this tactic, even at the expense of relatively easy penalty shots. Teams playing catch up footie always use this tactic (See Playing at Pace, Catch Up Footie).

**TEN MAN RUGBY**--A brand of rugby where the only players involved on attack are the 8 forwards, the halfback and the 1st five. It is characterised by plenty of hard yards, rolling mauls, bombs and kicks to touch. Often played by teams who have no confidence in their backline.

**TEN METERS**--The distance which the defending team must stand back from the play the ball. A good referee will keep a "big ten meters" while a poor referee will keep a "small ten meters", whatever that means. Thus it is very rare for the gap to be anywhere near 10 meters.

**"THAT'LL DO."**--You just have to tackle him, not kill him.

**TREATMENT**--A player receives treatment when they are given a physical beating of some sort. Some of the treatments that can be prescribed are:

- 1) Facial massage with the ground.
- 2) Stiff arm to the upper body region.
- 3) Upper cut to the jaw.
- 4) Pokai (a good poke in the eye).
- 5) Knee raised into the groin area.
- 6) Kick to the groin area.
- 7) Bite to the ear.
- 8) An elbow while their back is turned.
- 9) Stomp their heads pretending that it was the ball.
- 10) A descent crash.
- 11) Raking every part of their body with the boot for refusing to roll away from the ball.
- 12) Any other method which inflicts pain and you can almost get away with.

Players on the receiving end of treatment usually have to resort to the wearing of head gear for long periods, if not for the rest of their playing days. Remember different circumstances require different treatments and some may

cause permanent damage if mixed together so be careful! These should administered only by trained, professional thugs.

**TRY**--Method of scoring worth 5 points by touching the ball down in the opponent's goal area.

**TUNNEL**--The gap between the front rows in a scrum or the gap between the two lines of forwards in a lineout.

**TURNOVER**--When a team concedes possession of the ball they have turned the ball over. Sometimes used to describe the actions of the opposite team, i.e., forcing a turnover.

**22 METER DROPOUT**--The kick which restarts play after a missed penalty or drop goal passing the end goal line or touched down by a defending player. The ball is kicked back to the original attacking side.

**TWO PASS SPREAD**--A league term meaning that the ball is passed twice and then the receiver sticks his head down and charges toward the line.

**UNDER THE STICKS**--(i) Where a try has been scored between the two upright posts; (ii) When a conversion/penalty attempt doesn't go the distance, falling just short of the crossbar.

**UP AND UNDER**--A tactical kick which is popped very high and shallow allowing the kicker and supporting players to easily run underneath it for recovery. The kick is intended to put heavy pressure on any opposition player attempting to catch the ball. Also called a Garryowen due to the Irish club which originated the play.

**WEAKSIDE**--From a set piece, ruck or maul, the short side of the field. Also called the Blindside.

**WHEELS**--(i) A term that describes a player who is very fast. (ii) A term that describes the instance where a player is faster than the person marking him.

**WING/WINGER**--Either of the two backs wearing No. 11 or No. 14. Each will normally stay on the same side of the back line they are on throughout the match and are typically expected to be the fastest sprinters in the side. Wingers also have key duties during defense helping the fullback cover kicks and counterattacking.

**WING FORWARD**--Either of the two forwards wearing No. 6 or No. 7. Also called wing forwards or breakaways they bind to the scrum outside of the locks just behind the outside hip of the props. They can play always on the same side of the scrum or can specialize on either the weakside or strongside. The players with the fewest set responsibilities, their job is to aggressively pursue the ball, gain possession, and take off running. Also known as Flanker.

**"WITH YOU!"**--What you yell when you want to let someone know you're backing them up or you're open for a pass.

**WRAP IT UP**--(i) When the game is all but won, and the final whistle only needs to sound for a team to win the game (i.e., they have a huge lead), they will usually wrap the game up by slowing everything down, usually through continuous rolling mauls and constantly kicking for touch. This can be very irritating to watch, especially for fans of the losing team; (ii) When a team takes an unbeatable lead by scoring a try they are said to have wrapped the game up. This only occurs in the final minutes because anything can happen in rugby (See Rolling Maul).