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Chapter 1

Rugby? Wha...?

Rugby is a more than a sport. It's a passion. It's a disease you catch that infects your very core. People will tell you it's a cross between soccer and football, but that doesn't *really* prepare you for rugby. Rugby is its own ass-backwards self. There is *nothing* like it on or off the field.

How did rugby, American football's daddy, originate? There is that tired, hackneyed legend of the young and ever-so-rebellious William Webb Ellis, who one day, during a soccer match at Rugby School in England, decided to pick up the ball and run with it. However, most sports historians postulate that back in the day it was considered amusement for one town to try and carry a somewhat startled young pig to another town's village square. They would employ various methods of dodging, dashing, passing, or just plowing through en masse to achieve this. These primitive contests became refined over time and emerged as rugby and soccer.

To the casual observer of a rugby match today, rugby seems remarkably close to that version of its roots than some picked up soccer ball.

Well, wherever it came from, today's rugby is, at its best, a blend of strategy, strength, speed, and instinct. At its least, it is organized and glorious mayhem. **The object is to score more points than the other team by carrying, passing, and kicking the ball.**

Simple enough . . .

Chapter 2

Pitch, Kit and New Meanings for Words You Already Know

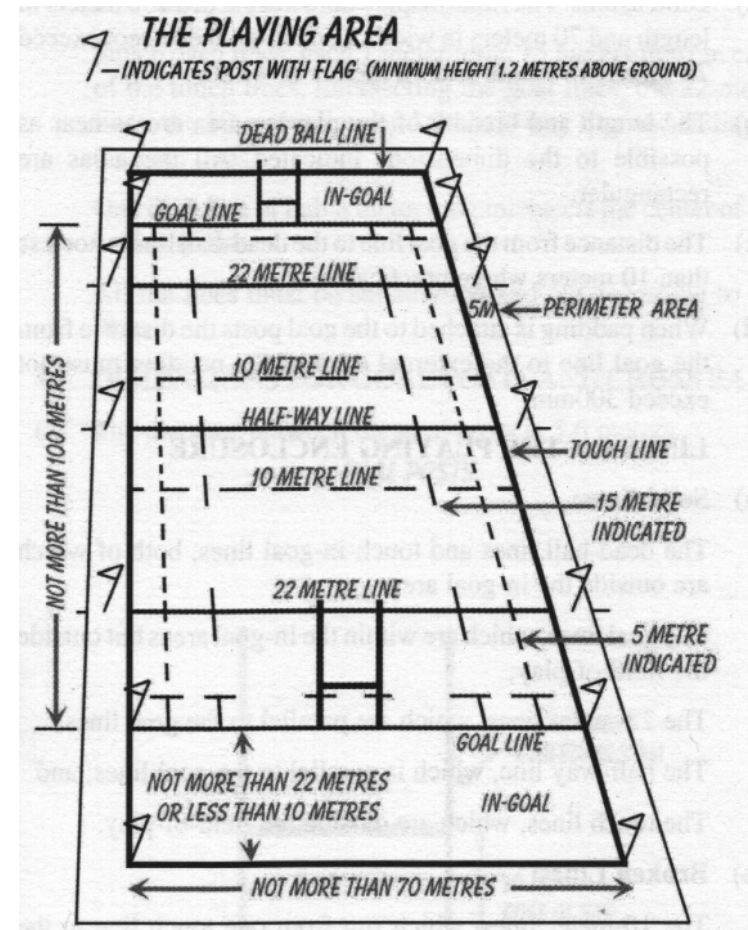
We play on a **pitch**. It looks like a field. And it is a field. But we call it a pitch.

It is preferably grassy and level, but we take what we can get.

As you can see from the diagram on the right, the pitch is 100 meters (110 yards) long and 70 meters (75 yards) wide.

There are four important lines on the pitch:

- The **half-way line**. The half-way line indicates where the pitch divides in half (duh!). Kick-offs to start the match, kick-offs to start the second half and kick-offs after each time a team scores are started here.
- The **22-meter lines** (25 yard-line). The 22-meter line is a strategic point on the pitch. We won't talk about it too much in this guide, but you learn that it is a very important line, especially when it comes to kicking.
- The **goal lines**. The goal lines mark where a player has to cross in order to score. It is similar to the touchdown line in American football.
- The **touchlines**. The touchlines mark where players go out-of-bounds along the length of the pitch. In rugby speak, "**touch**" is what we call the area outside of the playing field. When a player goes out-of-bounds, he is said to be "in touch."



For now one important, but tricky, thing to store in your memory banks is that *the lines are included in what is beyond them*. For example, when a ball or a player goes in touch (out of bounds) both the touchline and the area beyond the line is the out-of-bounds area. Once a player or a ball touches the touchline or the area beyond the line, the ball or the player is "in-touch" or out of bounds.

Similarly, the goal line both marks and is part of the "in-goal"

area. If a player places the ball on the goal line, he scores.

The Kit

Your rugby **kit** is simply what you wear to the pitch. It consists of

- a sturdy rugby jersey (not one of those polyester numbers from Ross or one of those trendier-than-thou versions from Abercrombie & Fitch)
- a pair of rugby shorts (your Daisy Dukes or hootchie-mama shorts won't do)
- matching socks
- cleats (called a **rugby boot**) and
- a mouthguard

...and that's it! Well, maybe a little athletic tape for effect, so you'll look pretty in photographs.

If you need help getting your kit together, consult our *Kit Guide*, which you can download from the team website (<http://www.neworleansrugbyclub.com/images/kitguide.pdf>).

A tip for rookies: leave your jewelry at home. Literally thousands of earrings, rings and necklaces have been lost forever in the linty "black holes" of people's pockets. You've been warned...

Quick note about body jewelry: unless you want an extra nipple, belly button or ear lobe ripped for you, take your body piercing out when you play.

You'll also need a ball - a **rugby ball**, of course! It looks like a fat football with more rounded ends. Get your own ball for practice away from practice. (Ruggers.com makes an *excellent*

match ball you can get for \$25.) You'll be glad you did.

Okay, got the pitch and kit down. So how do you play this damn game?

Chapter 3

The Basics

Begin with a Kick-Off

Teams usually line up for cleat inspection and salutations before the game, but the action begins with a kick-off. This is taken at the half-way line.

Like soccer, rugby is a continuous play game—the clock does not stop! The game is divided into **two halves, no more than 40 minutes long**. Unlike American football, there is no stopping to set up plays. **The only time play stops is because a penalty or injury has occurred.**

Any time taken for injury is added on to the half in which it occurs. The halftime break lasts no more than 10 minutes.

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.

The object, of course, is to rack up as many points as possible in those 80 minutes. Usually scoring a **try**—the equivalent of a touchdown in American football terms—does this nicely, but there are other ways. We'll talk more about scoring later.

Playing Rugby

Boiled down to basics, playing rugby is about getting the ball and using the ball while maintaining possession.

Lets say the other team just kicked-off to your team. Any player who is on-side may take the ball and run with it.

Let's say you caught the ball. You have options:

- *You can pass the ball.* But here's the rub: **the ball may only be passed backward or laterally (side-ways)**. If you pass it forward, it's a penalty (called straightforwardly enough, a forward pass). This is the big difference between rugby and American football.
- *You can kick the ball forward*, either on the ground like a soccer ball or in the air. Unlike American football, in rugby, kicking is often an excellent strategic move.
- *You can hand off the ball to another player.* You don't have to pass the ball to get it to another player.
- *You can run with the ball.* This is what most folks do. Preferably towards the other team's goal line but, certain ones on our team have been known to do otherwise (ahem!).

Let's say you passed the ball and the other team intercepted it. (bad rookie, bad!) You can regain possession (and your dignity) by:

- *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. **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."

- *Ripping the ball from the opponent with the ball.* Hey ,it ain't pretty, but it works.

One thing that confuses rookies is that they think that once the ball is dropped, the ball is dead. It isn't!! **The ball is always alive, even when it's on the ground.** If the ball is on the ground, anyone can pick it up and play it. The only time the ball is dead is when it goes into touch (out of bounds).

Any player may tackle, hold or shove an opponent **holding the ball**. This "holding the ball" bit is important. Unlike American football, if you shove, tackle, hold or block any person who does not have the ball, it's a penalty called **obstruction** and it is *cheating*. You should never cheat. Unless you can cheat well.

As you can see, players have a lot of leeway on the field. Regardless, whatever a player does, it must be in accordance with the Laws of the Game.

Laws? Oh yeah, the rules of the game are called Laws. And just like laws in real life, they are subject to the strict or loose interpretation of those who enforce them. In rugby, that person is the referee.

The Officials

There is one ref and two touch judges in every match who enforce the Laws. The ref is the sole arbiter of the Laws of the Game. His (or her) word is final. There is no appeal. The touch judges are there to call where a player or a ball goes in touch (out of bounds).

The important thing to remember is that there is only one referee. It may seem impossible (or at least improbable) that one lonely ref can see the actions of thirty other people on a huge pitch, but you'd be surprised what a good ref can see.

The important thing to remember with refs is that you can't talk back to them. Not even the coach can talk to the ref. (Bobby Knight, the easily ignitable former Hoosier basketball coach known for arguing with refs, would never survive in rugby.) The only folks authorized to talk to the ref during a game are the captains of each team. This includes foul language—you can be penalized if the ref hears you!

Smart players (and teams) learn to play to the ref—they figure out how the ref is going to call certain offenses and adjust their play to the ref's style. This is particularly true when it comes to how strictly the ref is enforcing the "on-side" laws.

The Concept of "Onside"

Anybody may play the ball. Let's repeat that. **ANYBODY** can play the ball. You may run with it, pass it, kick it, or tackle an opponent who has it - provided that you are **onside**.

Perhaps the most confusing aspect about rugby for players and observers alike is the concept of being on side. Which is unfortunate because it's very simple, generally speaking.

Rookies, this is key: if you are *behind the ball* you are **onside**. If you are *in front of the ball* you are **offside**. And being offside is a big no-no.

You won't be in trouble if you're 50 meters away tying your shoe, or even if you are in 10 meters away. But if you influence play in any way from an offside position or attempt to participate

in the game (attempt to get the ball, tackle someone with the ball, etc.), this is BAD, BAD, BAD. We're talking Penalty City, kids. DON'T DO IT.

The French term for offside is *hors jeu*—literally “out of the game.” That’s a good way to think of it. When you are offside, you are a “non-player” until you get back onside.

The concept of onside can be tricky at first to master, so tricky, that we’ve created a guidebook devote just to this topic (oh joy!). For now, keep these examples in mind.

- Say your teammate has the ball and wants to pass it to you. As he’s getting ready to pass, you move ahead of him. Doh! Now he can’t pass it to you because you are ahead of the ball (not behind it) and offside. Besides, if he threw the ball to you, it will be a forward pass.
- Say your teammate has the ball, and wants to pass it to you. He completes the pass to you. Can you throw it back to him? No, not until he’s behind the ball again.

Okay, so now you have the basics of the game under your belt. Let’s look at who all gets to play in this mess...

Chapter 4

Have We Got a Position for YOU!

To describe the individual positions in rugby, we'll talk about them in the context of one of the unique fixtures of rugby, the **scrum**. A scrum is the name of the formal conglomeration of players who bind together in specific positions when a **scrumdown** is called. It is one of the basic set formations (or **set pieces** or **set plays** in ruggar talk) of rugby. We'll talk about the other set formations later.

You can tell a lot about a ruggar from his position in the scrum. A prop is *usually* a stocky guy, a lock a tall one, a wing a smaller and faster one. A **scrum** occurs after various minor infringements of the law, such as when the ball becomes tied up, and other times you'll learn about later. It is a face-off of sorts, where each team is contesting to get the ball, and a favorite among forwards. Form and timing are more important than brute strength (um, we'll take some brute strength too).

This is what a scrum looks like:



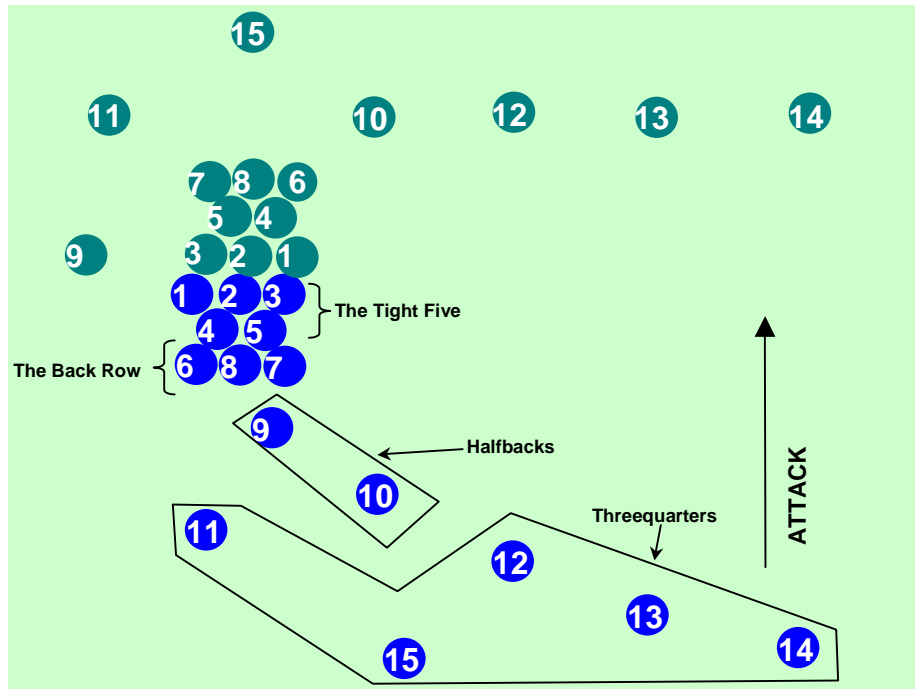
Every position on the team has a specific function. The team is

generally divided into *forwards* and *backs*. Forwards (a.k.a, the pack, Nos. 1-8) tend to be big and strong. Backs (Nos. 9-15) tend to be fast and agile. Forwards win the ball for the backs to use to score.

Traditionally, there's always been a bit of good-natured ribbing between the pack and the backs. But the pack vs back thing is really a bit misleading when you look at how a scrum actually works. The scrum really works as a series of mini-units, each with specific jobs to do.

The team is divided into four mini-units: the Tight Five, the Back Row, the Halfbacks, and the Threequarters.

Here's what a scrum looks like



Here's how the scrum works.

- The forwards from each team line up across from each other, and bind together in three rows: a row of three, a row of two and another row of three players.
- On the referee's mark, the two teams "butt heads." This forms the scrum.
- Starting on the left side of the scrum, the scrumhalf (No. 9) puts the ball straight into the scrum, between the two opposing front rows.
- The hookers (No. 2) from each team try to win the ball, using their feet to 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 (No. 10), who, along with the other backs (No. 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15) will implement some play to try to score.

Let's take a closer look at each of the mini-units.

The Tight Five

The Tight Five consists of the two props, the hooker and the two locks. These players are primarily ball winners.

Props. There are two props (also called *prop forwards*) in each scrum. In the scrum the props' main role is to provide a solid platform and support the hooker. The loose-head prop (No.1) plays on the left-hand side (loose head=left hand), and the tight-head prop (No. 3) plays on the right-hand side. Props are usually short to average height, stocky and strong, usually with

a short neck and broad shoulders. These are guys that typically enjoy contact.

Hooker. One of the most important roles on the team, the hooker (No. 2) is the main ball winner on the team. In the scrum, the hooker wins the ball by striking it back to the No. 8—we'll spare you the mechanics of how this happens. Players in this position can be almost any shape or size, but generally, he's short to average height, stocky and has long arms.

Lock. The locks (No. 4 and No. 5) are the engine of the scrum, providing a stable source of power for the front row. Typically, they are noted for their height (typically above 6'2") and their power. Players in this position are usually the tallest and strongest guys on the team, and possess superior leg strength.

The Back Row

The Back row consists of the two flankers and the No. 8.

Flankers. The flankers (No. 6 and No. 7) are the most aggressive guys on the team. Typically flankers (also called *wing forwards*) are relentless attackers. Flankers tend to be average height and tend to have an athletic build. Flankers have to have superior cardiovascular fitness. Flankers also have to be good ball handlers because they often find themselves supporting the backs.

No. 8. The No. 8 is a key position on the team. His primary duty in the scrum is to keep the ball at his foot until the scrumhalf is ready to pass it out. The No. 8 has the option to break off the scrum and pick up the ball and run it, so he also has to be a tactician, constantly reading the defense. His physical attributes are similar to those of a flanker: average to

tall height, athletic build, superior cardiovascular fitness, and good ball handling skills.

The Halfbacks

The halfbacks are the scrumhalf, and flyhalf . This duo comprises the two most important positions on the team. These two provide the crucial link between the forwards and the backs. They are typically the most skilled persons on the field.

Scrumhalf. The scrumhalf (No.9) is the second most important position on the team. As the link between forwards and backs, he is the pivot around which the majority of the attacks take place. He has to be a quick decision-maker (pass? kick? run?), and the quality of that decision will affect the entire team. The scrumhalf is also one of the most skilled positions on the team—he 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, usually short to average height. He's also very fit, as the game demands the scrumhalf do a lot of running.

Flyhalf. The flyhalf (No. 10) is *the* most important position on the team. A team with a good flyhalf is blessed because they are hard to find and even harder to mold. Typically, he's very calm, very clear thinking and very skillful. His position requires him to be able to read the game and anticipate holes in the defense. He has to be a superior tactician. Like the scrumhalf, he has to be excellent at many skills, particularly handling and passing, managing contact and tackles and kicking. The flyhalf determines alignment for the rest of the backs. With the help of the inside center, he also creates space for the threequarters to maneuver in. Typically he is average to tall height, athletic build, very fit and likes contact—he gets tackled a lot.

The Threequarters

The threequarters are also known as the finishers. Once the forwards have won the ball, and the halfbacks have distributed it, it is up to the threequarters to keep the ball alive until there is a try. The threequarters are the two centres, two wings and the fullback.

Centres. There are two centers. The inside centre (No. 12) typically works with the scrumhalf and flyhalf to create the platform on which the rest of the backs will score. The outside centre (No. 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 centres 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 have superior handling and passing skills, and have excellent tackling skills. Centres also have good peripheral vision, and excellent catching and kicking skills.

Wings. The wings (No. 11 and No. 14) are the fastest men on the field. They are usually the guys that score the tries. Wings (a.k.a., wingers, wingmen) must have excellent timing and constantly read the other team's backs for hints of counter attack. There are two types of wings, blind-side wing and open-side wing, and wings will play both during a game, depending on where the scrum is positioned on the pitch (don't worry about figuring it out now). Wingers come in all shapes and sizes, but he is typically on the lean side, but strong in the shoulders and lower body. Speed and agility are the main physical requirements for a wingman. They also have superior passing and handling skills.

Fullback. Another key position on the team, the fullback (No. 15) is the last line of defense. In the modern game, he has become the surprise element, unpredictably entering the backline to help penetrate the defense. A fullback needs many qualities and skills. He has to be brave because he'll take most tackles at full speed. He also has to be able to catch the high kick while under intense pressure. It is usually the fullback who catches/retrieves kicks. The fullback is usually the best kicker on the team. He is also very fast. Also, like centres, he has superior passing and handling skills. Physically, fullbacks are many shapes, but typically he is short to average, athletic build. He needs strong shoulders and lower body.

That's it for the positions. As you can see, there's a practically a place for every type of person on the pitch. Don't worry if you read a description, and it kinda sounded like you, except for one or two things. The great thing about rugby is that if you try out a position and it's not good for you, there's fourteen others just waiting for you!

Next up, we'll get a little bit more into the nuts and bolts of the game.

Chapter 5

Rucks and Mauls

It would be a perfect world if after every scrum you automatically scored. But there's that little pesky thing called defense that usually keeps you from scoring.

Defense is a whole 'nother subject, but suffice it to say that there's three types of defense. There's man-to-man defense, where each player is responsible for guarding one particular guy. There's zone defense, where each player is responsible for a certain area of the field. And there's drift defense, where the defensive line shifts as the ball moves out towards the other team's wing.

So let's assume your team got the ball out to the inside centre (No. 12). He's burning up the field, but unfortunately he got tackled. The inside center is forced to release the ball.

(Remember!: If you get tackled you must release the ball.)

Fortunately, the outside centre (No. 13) is nearby. The outside centre sees he can pick up the ball. He also sees that a couple of your team's forwards will arrive soon. Unfortunately, there's a wall of defenders that will arrive at the same time. If he picks up the ball, he'll only gain a foot. And, shit! the tackler is starting to get on his feet. What should the outside centre do?

He's got two smart options:

- He can form a ruck.
- He can initiate a maul.

A **ruck** is formed when one player from each team in the field of play—both on their feet—shoving each other with the ball *on the*

ground. This is what it looks like:



An example of a ruck. See the ball on the ground?

In our example above, to form a ruck, the outside center would start shoving the tackler that was getting up, who would, of course, shove back. Folks from your team and from the other team would join in, until the scrumhalf came to clear the ball out to the backs again, who have quickly realigned.

So you see, a ruck is simply a stripped down version of a scrum. Instead of 8-on-8, it's more like 2-on-2 or 3-on-3.

A couple of things about rucks. If a player joins a ruck, he must bind on to a teammate. And if teammates join in, they must do so from behind the hindmost player. Also, just like in scrums, **no hands allowed**.

Our outside center in our example above could have also picked up the ball, ran straight into the defender and hope that his teammates came in after him and formed a maul. A **maul** happens when at least one player from each team binds around

a player standing up with the ball in his possession.



An example of a maul.

Just remember, “A maul is tall.”

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.

Both backs and forwards need to know how to ruck and maul.

Oh, one more significant no-no. Once a ruck or maul forms, players not participating (by being fully bound - with at least one whole arm) **must remain behind the last person's foot**. This gives players not involved some time and space in which to set up and look for defensive holes. A really great team will be able to do this so quickly that their opponents will be caught with their shorts around their ankles.

Phases of Play

The key to understanding the mayhem called a rugby match is understanding the **phases of play** in rugby.

The first phase is always a **set play**, like a kick-off, a scrum or a lineout. We’ll talk more about lineouts in a bit. What you need to know right now is that each of these set pieces involves getting into established formations to fight over the ball. Set play is very organized and somewhat predictable.

Once the ball is out of the set formation (i.e., out of the scrum or lineout) **loose play** begins. Loose play is characteristically spontaneous and exciting. The different stages of loose play are broken up into what are called phases of play.

The different phases in loose play are marked by what are called **breakdowns**. Breakdowns are rucks and mauls, and named so because they break down the continuity of play, 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.

Next up: basic skills every rugby player needs to know.

Chapter 6

Skills You'll Know and Love

Backs and forwards alike need to develop certain rugby-specific abilities. These skills are the foundation of all play, simple and complex. **You must never, never, never neglect them.**

The basic skills are passing, handling, catching, kicking, running, tackling and managing contact.

Passing

We will begin with the **pass**. You already know that you can't pass forward. Lateral passing is OK, but a close call. What's left? You guessed it—we pass *backwards*. This explains the odd diagonal line-up of the backs. Technique may vary, but the important concept here is *catchability*.

Using both hands, the ball is passed in an underhand fashion (sort of like you're shoveling) and should arrive in the receiver's hands upright and solid.

You should lead the receiver so that he is bursting on to it and thus gaining yardage even though he starts behind you. Aim for the chest.

The distance between passer and receiver varies depending on how skilled they are, the particular play, and the weather. But generally speaking, a distance of about five meters is usual. The receiver stays at an angle sufficiently deep to receive the ball running at top speed. The passer should always turn his body toward the receiver and *pass the ball a little in front of the receiver* so that he will catch the ball while accelerating onto it. Don't pass until you see the whites of his eyes!

We'll practice passing plenty, so don't worry if it seems awkward or confusing now.

Handling

All rugby players need good ball-handling skills to cope with the different demands of the attacking game: running with the ball, passing and catching at pace (at actual game speed). Great teams have players who can take the fullest advantage of attacking situations. To do this they must keep possession of the ball. To truly 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, speeds and forces. A ball that arrives at a difficult angle may affect your ability to keep possession. 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. Becoming used to the unique shape of the ball early on will give you the confidence to cope with the unexpected when it happens - such as a ball bouncing wildly off the turf or a pass thrown too high or away from you.

It is to your own advantage whenever possible to carry the ball in two hands. This allows you to either pass or keep the ball safe when a tackler grabs hold of you. It also allows you to make a more accurate passes in open play.

When holding or moving the ball around your body, you must grab the ball firmly in your hands with the fingers spread across the seams (see the drawing below). The seams will help you maintain your grip. *Use fingers to control the ball not the palms.*



You will often see a ball carrier will hold the ball along his or her forearm or tuck it into the ribs near the elbow when running in the open field. This is a safe carrying style and allows players to run more quickly because they can pump their arms with a running motion. However, by tucking the ball, your players will make it difficult to readjust the ball in order to pass. When running with the ball tucked in, you must always be prepared to readjust your grip to pass the ball with two hands on the ball.

Kicking

Kicking is another bread'n'buter staple of this game. Rookies, in general, take awhile to incorporate this aspect into their game, so don't feel retarded if it takes you awhile to get the hang of it. But it does open up a world of options to you - so we'll briefly explain the range of fancy footwork.

The **pop kick** is a popular item. It is a short up-in-the air kick that you can field yourself. If some menacing hulk is barreling down on you, why take the hit? If there is no one to pass to, you can just pop it over him and run right past the defender to catch your own kick. You've got the momentum - he'll have to turn around to chase it and you. And remember, he cannot touch you if you don't have the ball.

The **grub kick** is like a hot grounder past the shortstop or a soccer dribble. You punch it along the ground with your foot

and, as always, *pursue* it. Because of the shape of the ball, the grub kick will take some weird hops, making it hard to handle.

All kicking should be done *strategically* and not in a panic. It is important to place kicks in a spot where your team can regain possession.

Longer kicks may be used too, where the ball is kicked to a part of the field that your teammates can get to first or make life miserable for an opponent who does. The ball may also **be punted into touch** (out-of-bounds) for long yardage. We'll explain later what happens after the ball leaves the field, but for now remember this:

If you are BEHIND YOUR OWN 22 METER line and kick it directly to touch (out-of-bounds) on a fly, the ball is brought back in at THE POINT THAT IT CROSSES THE LINE. This is a common strategy that can get you out of hot water when the opposition is breathing down your goal line. This is also true when you have been awarded a penalty kick anywhere on the field.

However, if you kick it directly out when you are AHEAD OF YOUR 22, the ball comes back in from the POINT IT WAS KICKED - meaning no yardage gained.

You can dribble the ball or give it a good whack with your foot anytime it's loose on the ground, but possession is 9/10th of the law in rugby. It's always best to secure the ball for your side.

Tackling

You've got to **tackle**. When you do, your tacklee has no choice but to release the ball, leaving it fair game for either side. No, the play does not stop, but he will. Tackling well and decisively

Chapter 7

You Wanna Win? You Gotta “Try”

OK, so how do we pile up points? There may be fifty ways to leave your lover, but there's only two ways to score.

Method No. 1

Well, first in our hearts is the **try**. It has similarities to a touchdown in American football, but with a *significant* difference.

A **try** is accomplished by bringing the ball into your opponent's in-goal and *touching it to the ground*.

Control, downward pressure, and simultaneous hand/ball/ground contact are essential. Woe to the rookie who gleefully gallops over the line and in his excitement forgets this key factors, and spikes the ball. Sorry kids, this isn't the NFL; the try won't count that way.

A try is worth **5 points**. 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 **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*. (Brutal, no?) In any case, it's back to the 50 meter line as quickly as the kicking team can collect itself. There is no official game stoppage.

Method No.2

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 in recreational-level 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.

If a team should touch the ball down in its OWN in-goal (better you than them), two things can happen.

1. If your team is responsible for bringing the ball in, a scrum, 5 meters back from the try line, will be awarded to the other team (meaning their scrumhalf gets to put it in).
2. If the ball traveled into the in-goal on the other team's impetus, your team will be awarded a 22 meter **drop out**. A **drop out (a.k.a. 22-meter drop kick)** means that your team may drop-kick the ball from any point behind the 22 meter line. The other team must *retreat immediately* to the other side of the 22. Remember this retreating business when the drop out is against you. Also learn to run backwards. You should never take your eyes off the ball!

Chapter 8

Beer Break !!

Phew!

Feel better about your knowledge of the game of rugby? Grab a brew and take a break for a sec.

You may be feeling a little saturated with rugby facts and figures at this point and as you might suspect, there is much, much more. Don't worry if it seems confusing or even ridiculous. Soon that light bulb will pop on, miscellaneous ideas will click and in spite of your best intentions, you'll be a rugby player.

Random Thoughts:

- Rugby is a continuous, flowing game with natural ebbs and surges, but no real time-outs except for injury. It has both premeditation and spontaneity. The faster you can make things happen, the more likely you will be able to score.
- All sizes and shapes of people can play. Just because you're small or lanky or short—or all of the above—doesn't mean you can't play rugby.
- It is an aggressive and physically demanding game. Fitness is mandatory. It's not a sport of your typical weekend warrior—you'll be winded in the first five minutes. It's a wise move to join a gym and commit to a regular fitness regime.
- A couple of little catchwords in rugby are **move forward** and **support**. Confusingly enough, you often have to back up or

pass back to support the surge forward. The overall team direction should always be lustfully aimed toward the goal line.

- This is a team game. The collective effort of 15 people is far more powerful than the individual. When everyone on the field is in sync, it's the coolest feeling in the world. Or at least the top 2 or 3. The best score happens when everyone contributes.

Chapter 9

Line Outs

Line Outs

If the ball is kicked, carried, or otherwise escorted into touch (“out-of-bounds”), its re-entry onto the field is by way of a **lineout**. A line out is kinda like the jumpball in basketball.



A diagram of one side of a line out.

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.



An example of a line out

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 are designated as **jumpers** (usually 2nd, 4th, and 6th in line). 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 5 meters before it may be played. The line out can extend out to 15 meters.

During a line out the backs line up in much the same way as

during a scrum, with one notable exception. In a scrum they must only remain behind the Number Eights or last person's foot. In a line out they (or anyone not participating directly) must remain 10 METERS back until the line out is completely over. No **creeping** (moving in before the line out is over) or it's another trip to Penalty City, kids.

The thrower from the team not throwing in and both scrumhalves (#9) stand where indicated on the diagram. There are short line outs, quick lineouts, and other variations, but that's all for now, folks.

Chapter 10

Penalties

Let's talk a little more about **penalties**.

For minor infractions of the law a simple scrum down will do. A forward pass is one such infringement. The infamous **knock on** is another minor infringement. A knock on is where you drop or bump the ball forward with any part of your upper body. The scrum is awarded to the non-offending team.

A scrum may also be called 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, as you may have guessed, but later for those.

It might behoove you to learn (at some point) the signals a referee uses to indicate what he or she has called. After the whistle the ref will usually give the **mark** with his foot and indicate, with his arm angled *down* toward one team or the other, who 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.

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.

For a **penalty kick**, the referee extends his arm *upward* toward the team to whom he's awarding it. A penalty kick is commonly given for

- obstruction (blocking someone who doesn't have the ball)
- offsides
- hands in a ruck
- play deemed dangerous by the referee

He'll also award it for any number of things that are extremely naughty. A penalty kick is awarded at the place the infraction occurs (usually). A mark will be given and that is the point through which the kick **MUST** be taken. 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: keep facing the ball!

Advantage

Now we will briefly ponder the vast and murky gray area of **advantage**. In most other sports, when an infraction occurs, the flow of the game stops. In rugby, a referee does not have to call a penalty if he feels that the offending team gained no advantage or that the other team was able to capitalize on it.

For example: a referee may see a knock-on occur, but wait to blow the whistle until it becomes apparent who has made subsequent gains. If the **NON**-offending team scoops up the ball and gains 10 meters, the penalty won't be called at all. This is

called "playing the advantage." The advantage law helps to keep the game flowing.

File this for another day, but keep in mind that even if you do spot an infraction, **DO NOT STOP UNTIL YOU HEAR A WHISTLE!** The referee may not have seen it or may be playing the advantage.

The Referee

As long as we're on the subject, let's talk a bit more about the referee.

There is only one ref, and this is a very significant fact. With 30 people careening around the field, one person cannot possibly see everything and thus some unscrupulous players have been known to cheat. Our team is above reproach and would never resort to such cheap tactics. It shocks us to hear that there are teams that do such dastardly deeds. And get caught.

Since you're new, it's wise to follow the rules. When the referee does call something, his word is **LAW**. He may as well be carrying two stone tablets in his hands. In fact, he cannot change a call once made—no video review here, kids. And it is no use arguing. In fact, you can even be penalized if you do. If you do need to make a comment to the referee, for any reason, do so through your captain.

Different referees have different styles. It is a smart rugby player who learns to "play the ref." Many calls in rugby are completely up to the referee's judgment -- especially those concerning foul play.

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! 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 ref 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 refs do not put up with dirty play.

Dirty play comes in many malodorous shades. For a player that repeatedly violates the Law, after repeated warnings from the ref, the ref can yellow card him. This means he's out of the game for five minutes. His team 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 as the most severe resolution of a problem. Should this happen, his team CAN'T bring in a substitute, leaving them to play short for the rest of the game. If you get red carded, it is reported to the Local Area Rugby Union and you are not allowed to play for fourteen days. Get red carded again, and you won't be allowed play for a year.

That's it for the mechanics of the game. Next, we'll look at the more social aspects of the sport.

Chapter 11

A Game of Hooligans Played by Gentlemen

The characteristic that sets rugby apart from all other sports is the brotherhood and code of etiquette. There's real rugby on the pitch and rugby off the pitch. The players from each team have a common bond in their love for rugby and use the Third Half as a time to honor the traditions of their sport. The players gather together, sing songs and celebrate beating the crap out of each other. The true essence of rugby lies in being gentlemen who take 90 minutes each weekend to become hooligans.

There is a spirit of camaraderie and sportsmanship among rugby players. After all, it is a weird sport -- nobody gets paid, you travel all around, and get bruises for your trouble. You've GOT to have a passion for it and despite all rivalries, it is a passion shared by everyone who plays it. As the sport is unique and intense, so are its players. Meeting ruggers of all varieties, from all parts of the country, is one of rugby's greatest delights.

Rugby is a lot of things to a lot of people. It is challenging and playful, exuberant and exciting. There are always new things to learn and old limits to push aside. We know you will love it as much as we do.

Appendix 1

The Basics of Rugby

Here are the basics of rugby, all at once:

OBJECTIVE

The object of the game is to advance the ball down the field by running it forward, kicking it ahead, or passing it laterally or backwards to a teammate, who may then run the ball forward in the attempt to score points. At the same time, a team seeks to stop the opposing team from achieving the same results.

SCORING

To gain points, players must score in the following ways:

- Score a try (5 points)—carry the ball over the goal line and touch the ball to the ground in opposition in-goal area (end zone).
- Score a conversion (2 points)—following a try, kick the ball directly through the opposition goal post uprights by means of a placekick or dropkick, the kick must be taken out directly in line from where the try was scored.
- Score a penalty kick (3 points)—following a penalty, kick the ball directly through the opposition goalposts uprights.
- Score a drop goal (3 points)—kick the ball directly through the opposition goalpost uprights at any time during play; the kick must be preceded by the player bouncing the ball off the

ground.

BASIC RULES

The basic rules of rugby are:

- A player must always be beside or behind the ball. Otherwise he is offside and not allowed to be involved with the play.
- A player stops the opposition by tackling them or taking the ball outside the playing area. This is accomplished by kicking the ball or pushing a player in possession of the ball out-of-bounds.
- No dangerous play is permitted (no jumping on other players, no kicking at other players, no tackles that are too high).
- Once a player has been tackled, he must release the ball and cannot play it until he has regained his feet.

NUMBER OF PLAYERS AND GAME LENGTH

A rugby match may vary in terms of players on the field and game length such as

- USUAL: 15s—there are 15 players per team (8 forwards, 7 backs). The game consists of two 40-minute halves.
- VARIATION: 7s—there are 7 players per team (3 forwards, 4 backs). The game consists of two 7-minute halves.

STARTING PLAY

- **Kickoff**—play begins with a kickoff from the center of the field. The ball must have traveled at least 10 meters.
- **Scrum**—after a minor infraction, forwards from both teams bind together in a tight formation. The team that has not omitted the infraction puts the ball into the scrum. Both teams then attempt to hook the ball back to their sides as well as push the opposition back.
- **Lineout**—when the ball goes into touch (out-of-bounds) over the sidelines, forwards from both teams line up beside each other and jump, attempting to tip or catch the ball and win possession for their team. The team that does not have possession of the ball when it went into touch gets to put the ball into play.
- **Penalty kick**—after a major infraction, the non-offending team is given possession of the ball. The opposition must be at least 10 meters back. The non-offending team may then kick the ball downfield, kick or posts, run, pass, or tap the ball and pick it up.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

There are special situations that represent advanced elements of the basic game of rugby.

Ruck

Ruck is the term given to a situation when the ball is on the ground and one or more players from each team are on their feet and in physical contact, closing around the ball between them. The purpose of the ruck is to provide some guidelines for

getting the ball back into play in a congested situation.

In a ruck, players can't

- handle the ball,
- jump on others, fall, or collapse a ruck
- interfere with the ball emerging from the ruck if in a prone position on the ground
- join a ruck from their opponents' side or in front of the ball (players must bind when joining a ruck)
- stand beside the ruck in front of the hindmost foot of his own players in the ruck

Maul

A maul happens when the ball is in the players hands and one or more players from each team are positioned on their feet and in physical contact, closing around the players with the ball. The purpose of a maul is to provide some guidelines for getting the ball back into play in a tackle situation.

In a maul, players can't

- Jump on, fall on, or collapse a maul
- Be offside at the maul (same rules as the ruck above)

Scrum

A scrum is a situation when players from both teams bind together to restart play after a minor infraction has occurred (i.e., the ball is dropped, passed forward or knocked forward).

In a scrum:

- Eight players must be present (three players in the front row)
- Hips must be below shoulders
- Players may bind together
- The ball must be put straight into the “tunnel” that is formed when the two opposing scrums meet.

Lineout

A lineout is called when the ball passes out of the sidelines (out of bounds). When this happens a lineout forms to reenter into play. The team not in possession of the ball when it passed into touch (out-of-bounds) gets to throw the ball into the lineout.

In a lineout:

- The lineout is formed by *at least* two players from each team lining up in single lines parallel to each other and directly out from the sidelines
- The team throwing the ball will determine the maximum number of players from either team who will line up (no more than seven players)
- There must be half a meter between players from the sideline (violation is a penalty)
- All players not directly involved in the lineout must be at least 10 meters back from the lineout until it is over (violation is a penalty)

- The ball must be thrown straight between the opposing lines

Penalty

Penalty is the term given to a situation when a major infraction has occurred (i.e., illegal tackle, offside, etc.)

The rules about penalties in general are:

- The non-offending team puts the ball into play by kicking it any distance from the ground at the location where the penalty occurred
- The non-offending team may kick the ball through the opposition goalpost uprights, kick it into touch or downfield, or kick it lightly then run
- The offending team must retreat 10 meters back from the location where the offense occurred and cannot move forward until the ball is moved from the mark at which the offense occurred.

Appendix 2

Positions: Physical Attributes and Positional Duties

Here's a brief overview of the positions and the physical attributes and positional duties.

FORWARDS

PROP (No. 1 and No. 3)

- Strong upper-body strength (usually this player will be shorter/stockier athlete)
- Effective participation in set pieces (scrummages and lineouts)
- Ability to add to the play in rucks and mauls
- Loose head prop (No. 1) responsible for supporting the hooker and assisting in gain the ball through put-in
- Tight head prop (No. 3) responsible for disrupting the opposition's loose head and hooker

HOOKER (No. 2)

- Possesses attributes/skills similar to those of prop
- Flexibility to allow for greater range of motion
- Ability to effectively and accurately throw the ball into the

lineout

- Ability to deliver a quick strike with the foot to win possession of the ball

LOCK (No. 4 and No. 5, a.k.a. Second Row)

- Size/strength/height (the lock is often the largest player on the field)
- Ability to provide the lineout with height and the scrum with push
- Ability to add to the play in set pieces

BACK ROW (No. 6 and No. 7, a.k.a Wing Forwards, Flankers, and No. 8, a.k.a. Number 8)

- Possesses all-around rugby skills
- Demonstrated speed
- Excellent tackling skills
- Proven ball-winning and retention skills
- Advanced tactical decision-making skills (back-row players will have their hands on the ball often.

BACKS

-
- Excellent passing skills, ability to pass quickly and accurately
 - Ability to kick in defense and attack
 - Ability to defend against back row moves
 - Ideally, a player who is left-handed and right-footed since this player follows the ball from left to right in the scrum (the left-hand, right-foot orientation serves to protect the ball when passing)

FLY HALF (No. 10)

- Responsible for initiating team attack and calling plays
- Responsible for organizing and ensuring that centers are up on defense
- Ability to handle and catch the ball cleanly and consistently
- Ability to kick on attack and defense
- Ability to handle the ball while running or while standing still

CENTER (No. 12 and No. 13)

- Ability to pass quickly and accurately
- Ability to tackle effectively
- Ability to handle the ball well in contact
- Ability to find the gap

WINGER (No. 11 and No. 14)

- Demonstrated speed
- Excellent defensive skills (this is an area that the opposition often attacks)
- Ability to counterattack deep kicks
- Ability to cover the fullback position when on the blind side of the field

FULLBACK (No. 15)

- Ability to kick the accurately and handle the high kick
- Ability to enter the back line decisively
- Excellent counterattacking skills
- Excellent open-field tackling skills (fullback is the last line of defense)