

Rookie Rugby: Rules of Play

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Players and match officials must endeavor to ensure the IRB Laws of the Game, modified by the following playing rules, are observed when playing Rookie Rugby. Rookie Rugby was designed as an introduction to the game, to be played by players that are as young as five (Under 6 or kindergarten) and perhaps as old as ten (under 11 or fifth grade). There is a total emphasis on the players having fun while running with the ball, evading opponents, running in support of the ball-carrier, passing, and running to tag the ball-carrier. In Rookie Rugby there is no tackling, no kicking, no scrums and no line-outs. In the USA it is likely that many players will not come to the game until they are older than five. In that event players may play Rookie Rugby, but should be encouraged and supported in moving on to the next module of either the Development Path or the Non-contact Alternative as soon as possible.

1.1 Object

The object of the game is to score a try (five points) by placing the ball on or behind the opponents' goal line. A penalty try will be awarded if a try would probably have been scored but for foul play by the defending team.

For the sake of safety, ball-carriers must remain on their feet at all times and they are not allowed to score a try by diving over the goal line. If a player grounds the ball while on the knees, the try should be allowed but, afterwards, all players should be reminded that they should stay on their feet. A player may not be prevented from grounding a ball by any physical contact (including placing a hand between ball and ground).

For safety reasons, where Rookie Rugby is played indoors or in restricted areas, a try can be scored by the ball-carrier crossing the vertical plane of the goal line without grounding the ball. This allows players to have their head up and be aware of their surroundings at all times.

When a try is scored, the game is restarted by a free pass from the centre of the pitch by the non-scoring team.

1.2 Teams

Rookie Rugby is played between teams of equal numbers of players, each team containing not more than seven players and not less than five players. Each team can have an agreed number of substitutes. Substituted players can be re-used at any time. Substitutions can only take place when the ball is 'dead' or at half time and always with the referee's knowledge.

1.3 Passing

The ball can only be passed sideways or backwards through the air, not handed to another player. If the ball is handed to another player or passed or knocked forwards (towards the opponents' dead-ball line) then a free pass is awarded to the non-infringing team, unless advantage occurs. In order to keep the game flowing, referees should play advantage wherever possible.

1.4 Free Pass

- (a) A free pass is used to start or restart the match from the center of the half-way line at the beginning of each half, from the touch line (at the place where the ball went into touch) when the ball goes into touch, and from where the referee makes a mark when an infringement has taken place.
- (b) At a free pass, the opponents must be five meters back from the mark. They cannot start moving forward until the ball leaves the hands of the passer. The player taking the free pass must start with the ball in both hands and, when instructed by the referee who will declare "Play", pass the ball backwards through the air to a team-mate. For safety reasons, the receiver of the pass must not start more than two meters from the free pass mark. The player making the free pass **must** pass the ball and cannot just run with the ball when the referee declares "Play".
- (c) If an infringement takes place or the ball goes into touch over the goal line or within seven meters of the goal line, then the free pass must be awarded to the non-infringing team seven meters from the goal line. This gives more space for both attacking and defending teams.

1.5 Tag

- (a) A tag occurs when an opponent simultaneously touches the ball-carrier with both hands anywhere from the waist to the knees, and the referee declares "Tag". The intent of the tag is just to make contact with the ball-carrier. The tag is not to be any form of push, shove, grab, pull, or block.
- (b) The above defines the preferred method of executing a tag, as it fully reflects all the characteristics that can be translated quickly and easily into the contact game. However, if both teams agree, players may use devices such as belts with detachable tapes or flags that a tagger may remove from the ball-carrier to indicate that a tag has occurred. No guidelines are made concerning the form of the devices. However, in practice their use should maintain the important principles of the tag, which are:
 - A two handed tag anywhere between the waist and the knee.
 - Immediate action on the part of the tagged player.
 - Neutrality of action on the part of the tagger.

If the teams cannot agree on the use of the devices then the match shall be played without them.

- (c) Only the ball-carrier can be tagged. The ball-carrier can run and dodge potential taggers but cannot fend them off using a hands or the ball.
- (d) When the ball-carrier is tagged the ball must be passed to a team-mate. The player does not have to stop, but must pass the ball as soon as possible. Within three strides or three seconds is a reasonable guide for

referees. If the pass takes longer than three seconds or the player takes more than three strides they must be penalized and a free pass awarded to the non-infringing team at the place where the tag occurred.

- (e) A tagged ball-carrier is allowed one step to score a try after being tagged.
- (f) A ball-carrier that is tagged within in-goal must ground the ball immediately in order to score. The referees may help by advising the ball-carrier "Touch the ball down, and I'll award the try", or similar.
- (g) If the ball-carrier dives to ground to score a try it will be disallowed and a free pass will be awarded to the defending team five meters out from the goal line.
- (h) The tagger must move away from the ball-carrier and take a neutral position until the ball has been passed. The tagger must not interfere with the ball-carrier's ability to pass, and may not intercept the pass. The tagger may not intentionally touch the ball until it has been touched by another player.
- (i) All of the tagger's team-mates must attempt to retire towards their own goal line until they are behind the ball. If a player, in an off-side position, intercepts, prevents or slows down a pass from the tagged player to a team-mate, a free pass is awarded to the non-infringing team. A player can, however, run from an on-side position to intercept a floated pass before it reaches the intended receiver.
- (j) To reward good defense and to promote the attacking team keeping the ball alive by passing the ball before being tagged, the team in possession of the ball will only be allowed to be tagged a maximum of six times before scoring a try. At the seventh tag, the referee will stop the match, and award a free pass to the tagger's team at the place of the tag. If the seventh tag takes place one step from the goal line and the ball is then grounded, the try will be disallowed and the opponents will be awarded a free pass seven meters out from the goal line, in line with the place that the goal line was crossed.

1.6 Foul Play

- (a) The ball-carrier may run and dodge potential taggers, but must not fend them off by using a hand or the ball.
- (b) Players must not intentionally make contact with opponents. Such contact includes, but is not limited to, pulling, pushing, running in front of or barging an opponent, or forcing the ball-carrier into touch. If such contact is made the referee must stop play, and the offender must be reminded of the non-contact nature of the game.
- (c) The ball must not be pulled from the ball-carrier's grasp.
- (d) Players must not kick the ball.

- (e) The game is intended to be played with players on their feet with ball in hand. If the ball goes to ground, players can pick it up but they must not dive to the floor to recover the ball.
- (f) In the event of foul play a free pass is awarded to the non-infringing team at the place of the infringement.