

Rugby League

Objective

Each team is given six tackles or chances to score. If, after six tackles, they have not scored, the ball is handed over to the other team who then get the chance to score with their six tackles.

A game of rugby league consists of two halves of 40 minutes, with injury time added on at the end of each half. In between the two halves, there is a 10-minute break after which both teams change ends and attack the half they were defending.

Play is only allowed to continue after the whistle or hooter sounds if the ball is still in play. The half will immediately end once a tackle is made or the ball goes out to touch. However, time can be extended for a penalty kick or a kick at goal. In that case, the half will end when the next ball goes of play or a tackle has been made.

Rugby league is played on a pitch which is no more than 100m in length and 68m in width. However, most juniors play on pitches smaller than this. The pitch is covered in several markings to indicate the different lines in the game. The three most important lines are the goal lines, deadlines and the half-way line. There are also several 10m markings from the touchline on the pitch to show where scrums and re-starts should be taken.

Forward pass

There are few sports where the ball can only travel backwards.

Rugby league is one of those, meaning the ball cannot be passed forwards at anytime. That even includes accidentally knocking the ball forwards with your hands or arm when you fumble the ball. So if the ball is knocked on forwards, the referee will stop play and award a scrum to the other team. However, the ball can travel forwards if a player is charging down a kick.

Passing

Rugby league is one of the few ball games where the ball can only travel backwards.

So that means the ball cannot be passed forwards at anytime. If the referee sees a pass that goes forwards instead of backwards, they will blow up and call a scrum at the place where the pass was made. The opposition will have the advantage - the feed - at the scrum.

Tackling

They can be spectacular, they can be boring, but the tackle plays a huge part in rugby league.

It's the only legal way of stopping the team with the ball from gaining ground.

There are certain laws which you must follow:

- You can only tackle a player with the ball

- You cannot make contact with the head in the tackle, only from the chest downwards
- You cannot hold the player down who you've tackled to deliberately stop them from playing the ball
- Once the tackle has been made, it is illegal to try and move the player from the point where the tackle was made
- Once a player has gone to ground, the tackler is not allowed to steal the ball

If you don't follow these laws, you are likely to give away needless penalties. Take care not to make any head-high tackles because they are dangerous. The referee, depending on how serious the tackle is, will show a yellow card or worse, a red.

- If a player is in mid-air attempting to catch a high kick, they cannot be tackled until they are back on the ground.

This is for safety reasons.

Also, a player cannot take a voluntarily tackle - that is go to ground without being held by an opponent.

Play the ball

This rule is the most unique skill of rugby league that makes it so different from rugby union.

Each team is allowed six tackles. If they have not scored during their six tackles, the ball goes back to the opposition. The tackled player must be immediately released by the tackler and cannot be touched again until the ball is back in play. After the player with the ball is tackled, they must lift the ball clear of the ground, face their opponent's goal line and roll it under their foot to the player behind them, the acting half back. The ball has to always travel backwards. A player can play the ball to themselves by heeling it backwards, stepping over the ball and then picking it up to run with it or to pass to another player. Once they've done this, their team has one less tackle to play with. For example, if a player is tackled on the second tackle, the referee will then shout "third tackle" on the play of the ball. The team will have only three more tackles left on the scoreboard.

Kicking to touch

This is a good way to gain valuable ground, especially on the fifth tackle.

Touch is found when a player kicks the ball, which has bounced IN the field of play, before going over the touchline. A scrum will take place opposite to where the ball went out of play, 20 metres inside the pitch. The advantage is with the other team who didn't kick the ball to touch because they get the put-in at the scrum.

There are a couple of important rules to remember when kicking to touch.

- Make sure the ball bounces inside the pitch before it goes out to touch.

If it goes out on the full, then a scrum will take place at the spot where the kick was taken.

- If the ball is kicked out to touch on the full on the fifth tackle, the opposition restart play with a play-the-ball at the spot where the kick was taken.
- If the ball goes to ground slap bang on the touch line, then the ball will be out to touch.

Advantage

This is a brilliant way of keeping the game alive after an offence or foul.

Instead of blowing up for a penalty or scrum, the referee gives the side who have not committed the offence the advantage. But this will only happen if it is in their favour. For example, if a one player knocks the ball on but the opposition obtain the ball in a promising attacking position, the referee can play advantage.

The 20 metre restart

Play will be restarted from the 20metre line if:

- An attacking player touches the ball before it goes out of play over the dead-ball line, except from a penalty or from a kick-off
- If a defending player catches a kick from general play from an opponent on the full inside their own in-goal area

The 40/20 kick

This is a fantastic way of putting pressure on your opponents with a long kick.

If a player is standing on or behind their 40-metre line, they can gain ground by kicking the ball into their opponent's 20-metre area. However, the ball has to bounce in the field of play before going out to touch inside the 20m area. If the referee is happy all these things have happened, they will give the attacking side the head and feed at the scrum. This will almost certainly give the attacking team possession again and six more tackles in a promising position.

Double movement

Once a player has been tackled, they must get up and play the ball.

Often when a player has been tackled close to the try line, they will often attempt to make another movement to ground the ball for the try. However, if they have been tackled, the referee will not award the try because it is seen as a double movement. The ball and the player have been grounded before the second movement for the try. However, if the player is in the process of being tackled and the ball has not been grounded before the try line, then they can make a second movement for the score.

Drop out

If an attacking team is under pressure they can force the defending team to drop out from under their own goalposts.

This happens when:

- A defending player brings the ball back over their own try line and grounds the ball in the goal area
- A defending player is tackled in their in-goal area
- A defending player kicks the ball in touch on the full from their own in-goal area

Every member of the defending team must be behind the kicker and the tryline when the kick is taken. The ball must travel at least 10 metres forward. The attacking team are pretty much guaranteed the ball every time, so the advantage is entirely with them. For example, if the attacking team puts a clever kick behind the opposition's defence, a defender is often left with few safe options. Surrounded by attackers looking to score a try on their goal line, their best bet is to ground the ball and relieve the pressure - but only for a short time.

Rugby league infringements

In rugby league, you can only tackle a player in possession of the ball.

That means you cannot challenge your opponent at any other time. Sometimes, a player will deliberately get in the way of an opponent without the ball because they think the attacker has a good chance of scoring a try. If the referee sees this, a penalty will be awarded to the opposition and the defender could find themselves sitting in the sin-bin for 10 minutes after being shown a yellow card.

Foul and dangerous play

The main offences for foul and dangerous play are:

- **Tripping** : No player can trip up another player on purpose
- **Striking** : No player can hit an opponent with their arm or fist
- **Kicking** : No player can kick the ball when an opponent is trying to pick the ball up off the ground
- **Dangerous play** : No player can make a challenge to put their opponents at risk on purpose, for example a head-high tackle
- Using abusive language

If the referee sees or hears any of these things, an instant penalty will be given. A yellow card and a spell in the sin-bin are also likely.

Tackling offences

Tackling is a huge part of rugby league but it's important to know how to tackle within the laws, so as not to give away a penalty. Once the player with the ball has been tackled and brought to ground, the tackler must release them, allowing the opposition to play the ball. Sometimes defenders can cleverly hold down the player with the ball to stop them playing the ball quickly. But if a referee believes a player is deliberately holding down a player in the tackle, he will award a penalty to the team in possession.

Sin-bin

The sin-bin is the bench where, in theory, all players cool off for 10 minutes after committing a serious foul or showing indiscipline. If this happens, the referee shows them a yellow card, just like in football, but the punishment is immediate. They must leave the field straight away. The game will continue without the player, putting their team at a disadvantage as they will only have 12 players on the field.

Offside in open play

Offside is quite a complicated rule of rugby league, so make sure you pay attention and listen to what the referee is saying.

If a player is in front of a team-mate in possession of the ball, or in front of their team-mate who last played the ball, they will be offside if:

- They are actively trying to play the ball
- They do not retire within 10m of an opponent waiting for the ball
- They move towards the opponents or the place where the ball lands without first coming back onside

The referee will award a penalty at the place where the offence took place.

Offside after a tackle

Once a tackle has been made and completed, the referee will tell the team without the ball to get back 10m from the ball. Only two players is allowed within the 10m and they are called the "markers". Every other player must be behind the marker and 10m from the ball. If they are not, the referee will award a penalty to the team with the ball. If the attacking team are less than 10m from the try line, then the referee will tell the defending team to get behind the try line.

Offside at a kick

If one of your team-mates is about to kick a high up-and-under or a grubber kick to run onto, make sure you are level or just behind them when they kick. If you are not, the referee will award your opponents a penalty because you are offside. The rules say that to be onside at a kick, an active player not in possession of the ball, must be behind the player who kicks the ball. If you are in front of the kicker, make sure you don't get involved with open play. You can do this by raising your arms and running back to an onside position. This shows the referee you have no intention of joining play because you know you're offside. However, if you make no attempt to move back to an onside position as play continues, the referee will award a penalty to the opposition.