

## **Mini Rugby: Rules of Play**

February 2, 2009

Players and match officials must endeavor to ensure the IRB Laws of the Game, modified by the following playing rules, are observed when playing Mini Rugby. After players have had some experience with Rookie Rugby, and provided that the appropriate level of coaching and other support is available, players will be ready to move on to a more challenging game. The Mini Rugby game is designed for players (playing in appropriate age groupings) aged as young as eight (under 9 or third grade) to players as old as ten (under 11 or fifth grade). Players may be older, particularly those that have had little or no previous rugby experience. The aggregate level of previous experience of the players and the quality of the support for them are more important determinants for the timing of the introduction of Mini Rugby than is the age of the players. Particular care should be taken to ensure safety in scrums and line outs. Mini Rugby program administrators and coaches must ensure that players are taught basic, safe techniques and skills in several practice sessions before they are exposed to contested scrums and line-outs in a match environment. Under no circumstances should a player at any level that has not been taught the techniques and skills be allowed to play in any contested scrum or line out during a match. If these circumstances cannot be satisfied during a match then the referee must order that they be uncontested.

### **2.1 Object**

The object of the game is to score a try (five points). A penalty try will be awarded if a try would probably have been scored but for foul play by the defending team.

### **2.2 Teams**

The game is played between teams having a maximum of seven players, three of whom will be forwards and form the scrum, with the remaining players forming the back line. Positions should be interchangeable and coaches are encouraged to rotate players around the positions so they all get experience in different roles. Each team can have an agreed number of substitutes. Substituted players can be re-used at any time. Substitutions may only take place when the ball is dead or at half time and always with the referee's knowledge.

### **2.3 Starts**

- (a) The match is started or restarted from the center of the half-way line or after a penalty with a free pass. The starter's team-mates must be behind the ball (i.e. nearer their own goal line than the starter). Before the pass is taken, the opponents must be seven meters away, nearer their own goal line. On penalty restarts, a quickly taken free pass whilst the opponents are retiring is not permitted. If the place for the free pass is given within seven meters of the goal line, the free pass is to be taken at or behind the mark on a line through the mark at least seven meters from the goal line.

(b) At the free pass, the ball is held in two hands, off the ground and is passed through the air to a team member. The referee is to ensure that the opponents are seven meters back before indicating that play is to commence. The receiver of the free pass must start from a line which is no more than two meters behind the passer. The passer must not run with the ball or dummy pass. General play resumes as the ball leaves the hand of the passer.

(c) Following an infringement for:

- off-side;
- high or late tackle;
- hand off/fend off ; (A hand off being the placing of an open palmed hand by the ball carrier against an opponent's face or body, while a fend off is an outstretched arm by the ball carrier towards an opponent to discourage that person making a tackle. Players should be encouraged to carry the ball in two hands to reduce the temptation to hand-off/fend off with a free hand.)
- kicking (including fly-hacking, i.e. kicking a loose ball on the ground); or
- obstruction,

the match is restarted at the place of infringement with a free pass to the non-offending team.

(d) After any stoppage not covered elsewhere in this Section (e.g. following an injury), the match restarts with a scrum to the team moving forward or, if neither team was moving forward, to the team last in possession of the ball.

## 2.4 General Play

(a) In general play, the ball can only be passed sideways or backwards, defined as 'towards the player's own dead-ball line'. If the ball is thrown forward or knocked on, a scrum is awarded to the opponents unless the referee plays advantage to the non-offending team.

(b) Off-side in general play is penalized in accordance with the IRB Laws of the Game. A player off-side in general play is to be penalized for being off-side unless that player is making an obvious attempt to return to an on-side position. **Penalty:** Free pass.

(c) If a player carrying the ball goes to ground in general play or if a player goes to ground to gather the ball in general play, the player must immediately do one of three things (or the player will be penalized):

- get up with the ball;
- pass the ball to another player; or
- release the ball for another player to pick up.

**Note:** If a player releases the ball by placing it on the ground and the player's team mates drive over the ball to prevent the opposition gaining possession, a ruck will generally be formed and in this case the ball may

not be picked up by hand until the ball has left the ruck, as described in Section 2.7. **Penalty:** Free pass.

## 2.5 Tackling

(a) Players who have the ball and are on their feet (except in a maul) can be tackled. Following a tackle:

- The tackler must immediately release the tackled player and get up or move away from the tackled player and the ball. The tackler must get up before playing the ball.

**Note 1:** Any tackle level with or above the armpit is to be considered a high tackle.

**Note 2:** The scrag-type tackle (i.e. swinging the player round by the shirt) must be considered dangerous play and must be penalized.

**Note 3:** The pile driver-type tackle (i.e. lifting the ball carrier off the ground and then slamming the ball-carrier to the ground violently) must be considered dangerous play and penalized.

- The tackled player must immediately pass or release the ball and must get up or move away from the ball. The tackled player may put the ball on the ground in any direction, or may push the ball along the ground in any direction except forward (towards the opponents' goal line), providing this is done immediately.
- At a tackle, or near to a tackle, players other than the tackler(s) or tackled player who play the ball must do so from behind the ball and from behind the tackled player, or the tackler closest to those players' goal line.
- Any player who first gains possession of the ball at the tackle or near to it may be tackled by an opponent, providing that the opponent does so from behind the ball and from behind the tackled player or tackler nearest that player's goal line.

**Penalty:** (a) 1 thru 4. Free Pass

(b) If, after a tackle, the ball becomes unplayable, a scrum is awarded. The scrum is awarded to the team that was moving forward immediately prior to the tackle or, if no team was moving forward, to the attacking team (the team in the opponents' half of the pitch).

(c) No player shall use the technique known or referred to as 'Squeezeball' and no person involved in the teaching or coaching of Mini Rugby may teach or coach or encourage players to use the 'Squeezeball' technique.

**Penalty:** Free pass.

**Note:** 'Squeezeball' is a technique where the ball carrier goes to ground, head forward (touching or close to the ground), irrespective of immediate contact with opponents, usually keeping parallel to the touch line, holding and protecting the ball close to the chest and, when on the ground, pushes the ball back between the legs.

- (d) It is illegal for any player to voluntarily fall on or over a player lying on the ground with the ball in the player's his possession or to voluntarily fall on or over players lying on the ground with the ball between them or near them. **Penalty:** Free pass.

**Note:** No advantage shall be played. A player is assumed to have fallen voluntarily unless the referee is absolutely certain the fall was accidental. In the very rare instances when the fall is accidental, play must be stopped and a scrum awarded to the team previously in possession. The object is to keep players on their feet and to prevent them from falling to the ground, thus removing a dangerous area of play. This will create proper rucks and mauls through encouraging players from each team to remain on their feet.

## 2.6 Mauls

- (a) A maul occurs when a player carrying the ball is held by one or more opponents and one or more of the ball-carrier's team-mates bind on to the ball-carrier. It is helpful if the referee calls 'Maul formed'. All the players involved are on their feet.
- (b) Once a maul is formed, other players may only join the maul from behind the foot of their hindmost team-mate in the maul. Players joining the maul from in front of this (e.g. from the side) are off-side and should be penalized. **Penalty:** Free pass.
- (c) A maul ends successfully when either the ball or a player with the ball leaves the maul or the ball is on the ground or the maul is on or over the goal line (when the ball may be grounded for a try or touch-down as the case may be).
- (d) A maul ends unsuccessfully if the ball becomes unplayable or the maul collapses (not as a result of foul play) and a scrum is awarded. Should a maul collapse, the referee must immediately blow the whistle to stop play, to prevent a pile-up from developing.
- (e) When a maul remains stationary or has stopped moving forwards for more than five seconds, but the ball is being moved and the referee can see it, a reasonable time is allowed for the ball to emerge. If it does not emerge within a reasonable time, a scrum is ordered. It is helpful in all maul situations if the referee calls "Use it or lose it" prior to awarding a scrum.
- (f) When a maul has stopped moving forward it may start moving forward again providing it does so within five seconds. If the maul stops moving forward for a second time, and if the ball is being moved and the referee can see it, a reasonable time is allowed for the ball to emerge. A scrum is awarded if it does not emerge within a reasonable time.
- (g) In the case of a scrum following a maul, the team not in possession of the ball when the maul began will throw the ball in at the subsequent scrum. If the referee cannot decide which team had possession, the

team moving forward before the maul stopped throws in the ball. If neither team was moving forward, the attacking team throws in the ball.

- (h) Any player at any stage in a maul who has or causes an opponent to have the shoulders lower than the hip joint must immediately be penalized by awarding a free pass. The object of this rule is to prevent the pulling down or collapse of a maul. Any player who has the shoulders lower than the hip joint can only move downwards unless the player has very great strength. The force through the shoulders should be directed forwards and upwards. All players should remain on their feet, thus preventing a pile-up and possible injury.

## 2.7 Ruck

- (a) A ruck occurs where one or more players from each team who are on their feet, in physical contact, close over the ball on the ground. It is helpful if the referee calls "Ruck formed". Players are rucking when they are in a ruck and using their feet to try to win or keep possession of the ball, without being guilty of foul play. Players must not stand on any part of another player's body in a ruck - **Penalty:** Free pass.
- (b) Once a ruck is formed, other players may only join the ruck from behind the foot of their hindmost team-mate in the ruck. A player may join alongside this hindmost player. Players joining the ruck from in front of this (e.g. from the side) are off-side and should be penalised. **Penalty:** Free pass.
- (c) Players must not use their hands to pick up the ball while it is still in the ruck. **Penalty:** Free pass.
- (d) A ruck ends successfully when the ball leaves the ruck, or when the ball is on or over the goal line (when the ball may be grounded for a try or a touch-down as the case may be).
- (e) A ruck ends unsuccessfully when the ball becomes unplayable and a scrum is awarded. Should a ruck collapse, the referee must immediately blow the whistle to stop play, to prevent a pile-up from developing.
- (f) Scrum following ruck: The team that was moving forward immediately before the ball became unplayable in the ruck throws in the ball. If neither team was moving forward, or if the referee cannot decide which team was moving forward before the ball became unplayable in the ruck, the team that was moving forward before the ruck began throws in the ball. If neither team was moving forward, then the attacking team throws in the ball. Before the referee blows the whistle for a scrum, the referee allows a reasonable amount of time for the ball to emerge. If the ruck stops moving or if the referee decides that the ball will probably not emerge within a reasonable time, the referee must order a scrum.
- (g) Any player at any stage in a ruck who has or causes an opponent to have the shoulders lower than the hip joint must immediately be penalized by awarding a free pass. The object of this rule is to prevent the pulling down or collapse of a ruck. It is to help the coach to teach

good technique and the referee to penalize bad technique. Any player who has the shoulders lower than the hip joint can only move downwards unless the player has very great strength. The force through the shoulders should be directed forwards and upwards. All players should remain on their feet, thus preventing a pile-up and possible injury.

## 2.8 Scrums

- (a) The scrum will be made up of one row of three players from each team, i.e. a prop on either side of the hooker.
- (b) Before starting the engagement procedure the players from each front row will bind together approximately half a meter from their opponents, with the props each binding firmly with one arm around their hooker, and the hooker with arms binding firmly around each prop. In all binds the hands will be at or below the level of the armpit. Each prop will then touch the upper arm of the opposing prop and pause before the engagement. The referee will talk the players through the engagement procedure in the sequence **Crouch, Touch, Pause** and **Engage**. On the grounds of safety, it is important that the referee manages the engagement of every scrum in this way.
- (c) The intent of the Mini stage is to introduce young players ultimately to the skills and requirements of contested scrums. However, coaches and program administrators should ensure that this done gradually in a safe, controlled manner. Players should be taught basic, safe scrum techniques and skills in several practice sessions before they are exposed to scrums in a match environment.

If several of players involved in a scrum have been taught the techniques and skills, but have still not had substantial match experience with scrums, then the scrums should be uncontested. **Under no circumstances should a player that has not been taught the techniques and skills be allowed to play in any contested scrum during a match.**

If scrums are uncontested the team awarded the scrum will throw the ball into the scrum and must be allowed to win it without contest. Opponents cannot push or strike for the ball. If they do, a free pass is awarded to the team throwing the ball into the scrum.

- (d) At contested scrums the team awarded the scrum will throw the ball into the scrum and the players of either team in the scrum may contest the ball. Although scrums are contested, under no circumstances is the scrum to be:
  - pulled in any way, or pushed more than 1.5 meters towards either goal line. **Penalty:** A free pass at the original place against the team that has pulled or pushed the scrum;
  - wheeled more than 45 degrees. **Penalty:** If a team intentionally wheels a scrum, a free pass will be awarded against that team. If the

scrum is wheeled more than 45 degrees without a free pass award, the scrum will be reset with the same team throwing the ball in.

A non-contested scrum, as described in Section 2.8(c) above, must replace a contested scrum on safety grounds in any of the following circumstances:

- if a player in a scrum has to be replaced and there is no adequate replacement;
  - if players involved in a scrum have not been properly trained;
  - if one team is obviously stronger and more experienced than the other and the referee has been unable to get the stronger team to reduce their push to take this into account.
- (e) Front rows must not be allowed to charge at each other. If they start to engage too close together and with necks and backs bent, they must be stopped and the scrum reformed. The props' body positions must be parallel to the touch line (not boring in). There must be no downward pressure exerted by hands or arms. Shoulders must always be above the level of the hips.
- (f) If the scrum collapses, the whistle must immediately be blown and the appropriate penalty awarded or the scrum reset. If a player is persistently involved in collapsing or illegal binding they must be replaced. If a player's lack of technique or strength is a danger then they must be replaced. All players involved in scrums, including replacements, should be suitably trained and experienced.
- (g) Any player at any stage in a scrum who has or causes an opponent to have the shoulders lower than the hip joint must immediately be penalized by awarding a free pass. The object of this rule is to prevent the collapse of a scrum. It is to help the coach to teach good technique and the referee to penalize bad technique. Any player who has the shoulders lower than the hip joint can only move downwards unless the player has very great strength. The force through the shoulders should be directed forwards and upwards; all players should remain on their feet, thus preventing a pile-up and possible injury.
- (h) The back line of the team **NOT** throwing the ball into the scrum must remain five meters behind the scrum (or on or behind the goal line if that is closer) until the ball emerges or the opposing scrum-half places hands on it. Until this happens, their scrum-half must remain directly behind the scrum, in the pocket edged by the two props.
- (i) The back line of the team throwing the ball into the scrum must remain five meters behind a line through the rear-most foot of their props/hooker until the ball emerges or the scrum-half places hands on it. If the team putting the ball into the scrum loses possession in the scrum, its scrum-half must retire directly behind the scrum, in the pocket edged by the two props, until the ball emerges or the opposing scrum-half places hands on it.

- (j) If a scrum is awarded within five meters of the goal line, the scrum is to be taken at a mark such that the middle line of the scrum is five meters from the goal line. In this case the defending backs must stay on or behind the goal line.
- (k) Referees should pay particular attention to ensure that the scrum-half throwing the ball into the scrum is not "feeding". The scrum-half must hold the ball with both hands, with its major axis parallel to the ground/the touch line, midway between knees and ankles. The scrum-half must release the ball from outside the tunnel so that it lands midway between the two front rows and beyond the width of the nearer prop's shoulders.

## 2.9 Line-outs

- (a) If the ball or player carrying the ball goes out of play, a line-out will take place at the mark at which the ball or player crossed the touch line. If a line-out is awarded within five meters of the goal line, the line-out is to be taken at a mark five meters out from the goal line. The opponents of the team who carried or last touched the ball before it went into touch throw the ball in. A quick throw-in is not permitted.
- (b) The line-out will be made up of two players from each team (who stand between two and seven meters from the touch line) plus the player throwing the ball in and an immediate opponent (who must stand within two meters of the player throwing the ball in) and one player from each team in a position to receive the ball (i.e. scrum-half). Both the thrower-in and the immediate opponent are able to take an active role in the line-out as soon as the ball has been touched by one of the players in the line-out. Players not taking part in the line-out must stay behind the off-side line until the line-out ends.
- (c) The off-side line for all players not participating in the line-out (all players other than those described under Section 2.9(b)) is seven meters back from the line-of-touch, parallel to the goal line, and they must remain behind that off-side line until the line-out has ended. If the line-out is closer than seven meters to the goal line, the goal line is the off-side line.
- (d) The intent of the Mini stage is to introduce young players ultimately to the skills and requirements of contested line-outs. However, coaches and program administrators should ensure that this done gradually in a safe, controlled manner. Players should be taught basic, safe line-out techniques and skills in several practice sessions before they are exposed to line-outs in a match environment.

If several of players involved in a line-out have been taught the techniques and skills, but have still not had substantial match experience with line-outs, then the line-outs should be uncontested.

**Under no circumstances should a player that has not been taught the techniques and skills be allowed to play in any contested line-out during a match.**

If the line-outs are uncontested the team throwing the ball in must be allowed to catch and win the ball without any interference from the opponents. The uncontested phase of the line-out continues until the line-out has ended and the catcher is therefore protected from contact from the opponents unless the catcher decides to pass or release the ball.

- (e) At contested line-outs the team awarded the line-out will throw in the ball and the players of either team in the scrum may contest for the ball.
- (f) In both contested and uncontested line-outs, the ball must be thrown into the line-out (i.e. between two and seven meters) and not beyond it, i.e. the ball must be played by one of the players within the line-out. Should the ball be thrown beyond seven meters without contact, the opposition will be awarded the throw. Should the opponents then throw beyond seven meters without contact, a scrum will be awarded to the team originally throwing in. No advantage is to be played in any of these circumstances.
- (g) The line-out begins when the ball leaves the hands of the player throwing it in. The line-out ends when the ball or a player carrying it leaves the line-out. This includes the following:
  - when the ball is thrown or knocked out of the line-out;
  - when a line-out player hands the ball to a player who is peeling close to and parallel to the line;

**Note:** "Peeling" occurs when a player leaves the line-out (after the ball has been thrown in) to catch the ball knocked or passed back by a team mate, or to take the ball from a team-mate who has caught and held it.

  - when a ruck or maul develops in a line-out and both feet of all the players in the ruck or maul move beyond the line-of-touch; and
  - the ball has been passed or carried out of the line-out or if the catcher decides to drive through the line-out.
- (h) When the ball becomes unplayable in a line-out, play restarts with a scrum to the team moving forward or, if neither team was moving forward, to the team last in possession of the ball. The scrum will take place seven meters in from the touch line opposite the point where the line-out took place.
- (i) All 'peeling off' movements must be close to and parallel with the line-out. Players must keep moving. Lifting/supporting is prohibited at this level (i.e. a player may not bind to a jumper until they return to the ground). The player designated to receive the ball (i.e. the scrum half) may not enter the line-out to compete for the ball.

## 2.10 In-goal

- (a) The in-goal area includes the goal line but not the touch-in-goal line, the dead-ball line or the corner posts.

- (b) If the attacking team grounds the ball in in-goal without having committed an offence then a try is awarded. A ball is grounded by applying downward pressure by hand, arm, or chest when the ball in contact with the ground.
- (c) If the attacking team is unable to ground the ball for a try because the ball is not in contact with the ground (e.g. a hand or body is in between) or the attacking player is unable to apply downward pressure, and a scrum is awarded to the attacking team five meters out from the goal line.
- (d) If the defending team grounds the ball in in-goal, or the ball becomes dead by going or being carried into touch then:
- If the attacking team carried the ball into in-goal or last touched the ball before it went into in-goal, a free-pass is awarded to the defending team seven meters out from the goal line;
  - If the defending team carried the ball into the in-goal or last touched the ball before it went into in-goal, a scrum is awarded to the attacking team seven meters out from the goal line.