

Rule 1- Method of scoring

A try is worth one point. To score a try a player must carry the ball over the opponents' goal line and press the ball down on the ground. (To ensure safe practice when playing on hard surfaces, it is suggested players score a try by merely running over the goal line with the ball) After a try is scored the game restarts from the centre of the field with a free pass by the non-scoring team. (See Rule 4, 'The Free Pass')

Rule 2- Passing

No forward passes are allowed and will be penalised by a free pass being awarded to the non-offending team at the place the ball left the player's hands. A forward pass is any pass where the ball travels in the direction of the opponents' goal line. (Perhaps, with real beginners, passing in any direction could be used as an initial introduction to rugby)

Note: A pass directly sideways is allowed and in fact can be the most effective pass players make as no ground is lost with this type of pass.

THE NO FORWARD PASS RULE

Rule 3 -The 'Tackle' (Tag)

Only the player with the ball can be tagged and a tag is simply the removal by a defender of one of the two ribbons from the ball carrier. Ball carriers can run or dodge potential taggers but cannot fend them off, spin around or guard or shield their ribbons in any way. This includes using the ball to fend away defenders.

The defender then holds the ribbon above their head and shouts 'tag' for all to hear. Defenders must back off at least one metre from the ball carrier, allowing space for them to pass. They are not allowed to snatch the ball from the player's hand.

Note: When playing with a referee, it is helpful to players if the referee shouts 'pass' as a tag is made.

Once tagged, the player in possession of the ball must attempt to stop as soon as possible and pass the ball within 3 seconds of being tagged (real beginners could be given longer). Even at full pace, the ball carrier will be expected to stop in 3 strides.

Near the goal line, players are only allowed one step to score after being tagged. If their momentum means they have taken 2 or 3, then they must attempt to pass to a team-mate to score, even if they are now over the goal

line.

Note: Players can pass in the act of stopping.

After a tag has been made, both the ball carrier and the defender are momentarily out of the game. The defender can take no further part until they have handed back the ribbon to the attacker (not thrown it on the floor) and the attacker no further part, until they have replaced their ribbon back on their belt.

Note: The defender hands back the ribbon only after the attacker has passed the ball. This action simulates the time taken up by defenders when tackling in full contact rugby and stops defenders being unrealistically active as can happen in traditional games of touch rugby.

Remember - There should be no tags on the floor at any time.

Very occasionally, a ball carrier may accidentally flick off one of their own ribbons in the act of running, making it very difficult for a defender to tag them. In this case the game should be stopped and the player allowed to replace it. The game then restarts with a free pass to the team in possession at the place where the ribbon came off.

Rule 4 - The Free Pass

A free pass is used to start the game (from the centre of the field) or to restart it at the place where the ball went out of play or an infringement took place.

Note: If an infringement takes place over the goal line, or within 5 metres of the goal line, then a free pass should be awarded to the non-offending team, 5 metres out from the goal line to create some space.

At a free pass the ball is held in two hands and on the instruction 'play' given by the referee the player passes the ball to a team-mate. More experienced players can be made to tap it with their foot first before passing, as they do when taking a tap penalty in full contact rugby. When playing without a referee, the opposing team captain gives the instruction to 'play'.

Note:

It is the referee (or the opposing team captain when playing without a referee) who dictates when a free pass is taken by saying 'play'. Players cannot take a quick free pass in Tag Rugby, instead referees must allow sufficient time for defenders to get back before restarting the game.

The player making the free pass must start play with a pass, they are not allowed to run with it themselves.

The opposition cannot start moving forward until the player has actually passed the ball.

At a free pass, the opposition must be 7 metres (7 large steps) back. More experienced players may prefer 10 metres.

Rule 5- Ball out of play

If the ball or ball carrier goes out of play a free pass is given to the other team from the sideline.

These are the five basic rules of Tag Rugby. Youngsters who understand these can play a simple version of the game. As players gain in experience, and their skill levels and understanding of the game develop, the following rules can be gradually introduced at the discretion of the teacher or coach.

Further rules for beginners

A. Knock-ons

A knock-on occurs when the player attempting to catch the ball fumbles it and knocks it forward to the ground in the direction of the opponents' goal.

Note: The ball must touch the ground for a knock-on to occur, so if a player fumbles a pass but manages to catch it before it hits the ground, play should continue.

B. Off-side

This rule can be introduced at an early stage to allow some flow to the game and develop good habits for the future. Off-side only occurs immediately after a tag has been made and only those defenders, who interfere with the game, should be penalised. In simple terms, once a tag has been made all defenders should make an effort to get back on their side of the ball and not deliberately stand in an off-side position, blocking the pass or waiting for an interception. Off-side is penalised by awarding a free pass to the non-offending team.

Note: Where defenders find themselves in an off-side position at a 'tag', they should be encouraged to get back on-side as quickly as possible, or clearly indicate they have no intention of interfering with play by either ducking right down, or by putting both arms straight above their head and getting out of the way. They must not block, intercept or interfere with the pass in any way.

Once the pass has been made and play continues there is no off-side in the game until the next ball carrier is tagged.

Note: It tends to be the defenders standing off-side and within 3 metres of the ball that need penalising the most. Where defenders are off-side but not interfering with play, then play should be allowed to continue permitting the game to flow.

THE OFF-SIDE RULE

C. The Advantage rule

As players become familiar with the rules, teachers and coaches should be encouraged to introduce the 'advantage' rule to create quick reactions and fewer stoppages in the game. The advantage rule states that if an infringement has occurred, the referee should not whistle immediately but wait to see if the opposition gain a territorial or tactical advantage from it. If they clearly do, then play should be allowed to continue. However, if the non-offending team does not in fact gain an advantage, the referee shall whistle and bring play back to the place of the original infringement and award a free pass to the non-offending team.

D. Number of Tags ('tackles')

It is suggested with real beginners that there are no set number of tags. However, once skill levels have developed, the team in possession of the ball could be given a set number of consecutive tags to score a try. This rewards good defence and encourages players to pass to support players before being tagged. Failure to score after this set number of tags results in a 'turnover', with the opposition gaining a free pass at the place the last tag took place. Experience has shown that 4 or 5 consecutive 'tags' is a good number for young players to use; more able players could be given less.

Note: Referees or the defending team captain could call out the number of tags when players are tagged e.g. 'Pass, one' 'pass, two' etc.

For a tag to count, the ball must still be in the hands of the ball carrier at the moment the tag is made. If a defender removes a ribbon after the ball carrier has passed the ball the tag should not be counted.

After a free pass has been awarded, the number of tags start back to zero. This is a good incentive for the team not in possession of the ball not to deliberately infringe.

Things to avoid

- **No contact** - strictly no contact or grabbing a player's clothing.
- **No kicking** - no kicking is allowed in Tag Rugby.

- **No hand-offs** - no hand-offs on the body or face or to swipe a defender's hand away to stop them taking your ribbons. This includes using the ball to fend off defenders.
- **No diving on the ball** - for safety players are not allowed to dive on a loose ball but instead must remain on their feet to play it.
- **No spinning** - ball carriers are not allowed to deliberately spin around to avoid being tagged.
- **No deliberate barging into defenders** - for safety, the ball carrier and the defender should attempt to avoid contact with each other at all times.
- **No diving to score a try** - Tag Rugby is often played during the summer months on hard grounds. For safety, it is recommended that young players are not allowed to dive in the act of scoring.

Whenever the Tag Rugby rules are broken, a free pass is awarded to the other team at the place the infringement took place and the number of tags (if playing Rule D) start back to zero. If the infringement took place over the goal line, or within 5 metres of it, the free pass is awarded 5 metres out from the goal line to create some space.

Notes:

- *To become successful in mixed Tag Rugby, teams will need to actively involve all their team members in attacking and defending situations. There is a tendency with young players for the boys not to fully appreciate the contribution girls can make to the team and as a result do not pass to them often enough. Experience has shown that by introducing the rule that two points, rather than one, is awarded for a try by a girl, does usually produce greater integration and team involvement. If deciding to play this rule, then it must be stated that if a boy carries the ball over the try line he cannot then pass it to a girl to gain the extra point. If this does happen, only the one point should be awarded.*
- *At the discretion of the teacher or coach, Tag Rugby can be developed with more experienced players to involve line-outs, scrums and kicking. Summary of the major rules of Tag Rugby*
- *Teams are usually made up of 7 players. For mixed games the rule is usually that each team contains 3 or 4 females.*
- *Games are made up of two halves of 7 minutes each with a break of 1 minute for half time. For festivals, games of 10 minute duration with no half time help avoid confusion for young players and saves time.*
- *One point is awarded for a try. (Rule 1 - Method of scoring)*
- *No player can participate in the game without both ribbons being correctly in place.*

- Both the ball carrier and defenders must avoid contact with each other at all times. The ball carrier cannot deliberately charge into defenders. (Rule 3 - The 'Tackle')
- No hand-offs, using the hand or ball or swiping the defender's hand away. (Rule 3 - The 'Tackle')
- To stop the ball carrier, defenders must remove one of the two ribbons and shout 'Tagged'. The attacker must then stop and pass immediately (maximum of 3 seconds). (Rule 3 - The 'Tackle')
- If playing with a referee, it would help players if referees shout 'pass' when a tag is made, and then, 'one, two, three...' depending on the number of consecutive tags the defending team has made. (Rule D - Number of Tags)
- Defenders must allow room for the ball carrier to pass after they have been tagged. (Rule 3 - The 'Tackle')
- After a tag has been made, both the ball carrier and the defender cannot take any further part in the game until the defender has handed back the ribbon to the attacker (not thrown it on the floor) and the attacker has replaced this ribbon back on their belt. (Rule 3 - The 'Tackle')
- If an attacking team has not scored by the allocated number of tags (4 or 5 is usually played with young players) on the last tag there is a turn over of possession, and play is restarted with a free pass being awarded to the defending team. (Rule D - The Number of Tags)
- A free pass restarts all stoppages of play. At a free pass, the opposition is given time to get back 7 metres, and it is always the referee, (or opposition captain if there is no referee) who restarts the game by calling out 'play'. No quick free passes are allowed and the player making a free pass must pass the ball first. They are not allowed to run themselves. (Rule 4 - Free Pass)
- Near the goal line, players are only allowed one step to score after being tagged (Rule 3 - The Tackle)
- Ball carriers are not allowed to spin around to avoid being tagged.
- If any infringements have taken place a free pass is awarded to the non-offending team, and the number of tags start back at zero. (Rule 4 - Free Pass)
- Off-side only occurs immediately after a tag has been made. All defenders who are in front of the ball at a 'tag' are off-side and must not interfere with the game in any way. (Rule B - Off-side)
- There is no need to penalise a player who may find themselves off-side but is not interfering with play in any way. (Rule B - Off-side)