



# Tag Rugby



FORD  
FOUNDATION RUGBY





**"Tag Rugby is easy to teach and easy to learn, the pupils can even officiate themselves"**

**Andy Henderson, SRU Development Officer for Dundee**

**"Tag Rugby, well it's the way forward isn't it"**

**Chris Patterson (Edinburgh Reivers and Scotland)**

**"Tag Rugby is easy to teach and is a game that children can pick up instantly"**

**Sarah O'Neill, School Sports Co-ordinator, St Columba's RC High School, Dunfermline**

**"A child friendly version of a conventional sport"**

**Times Educational Supplement**

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**Note: The laws for Tag Rugby are also explained in the Ford Tag Rugby Video**



# Introduction

**"If rugby is to become a world sport like football or basketball, then ways must be found of introducing it to youngsters so they will play the game spontaneously when they are unsupervised in playgrounds or running about on hard and uneven surfaces".**

**'Sports in Schools' Times Newspaper**

Tag Rugby is a new form of non contact (no tackling) rugby pioneered in Devon in the early 90's. In tag rugby, players wear a light belt with two ribbons attached to it by velcro. A "tackle" is simply the removal of one of the two tags by a defender and then the ball carrier must pass. Teachers and coaches have said they enjoy tag because it:

**"Shows clearly when a tackle is made and prevents arguments"**

**"Allows players to easily officiate their own games"**

**"Fosters appropriate lines of running which are required for success in the full 15-a-side game"**

**"Encourages people to run at spaces not people"**

This fast, simple and exciting game promotes the fundamental skills of running, handling, evasion and support play, whilst developing basic principles of attack and defence, without the fear of getting hurt.

In its simplest form tag rugby can be played with no scrums and lineouts and teams can be as small as 4 or 5 a side. Teachers and players need no previous knowledge of rugby to get started, which makes tag rugby an ideal game for girls and boys of all ages and abilities.

**"No scrums, no lineouts, no tackling, no injuries"**

Radio 4, "Women's Hour"

It also has a great deal of flexibility

- Tag can be played on hard surfaces
- Tag is suitable for both beginners and experienced players
- Tag is a family fun game for the local park or even the beach
- Tag games can be as small as 4-a-side
- Tag can also be used for simple dodging, chasing and warm up activities



# Part 1 - Laws for Tag Rugby

## Laws for Tag Rugby

**Note :** These laws also apply to the game of New Image Rugby which is played without the tag belts. The only difference is that in New Image Rugby rather than removing a tag, defenders merely touch the ball carrier with two hands simultaneously, one hand on either side of the ball carriers hips.

## What is a Tag Belt?

All players wear a tag belt which has two ribbons (tags) attached to it by velcro. The belt is worn around the waist and on the outside of the clothing. Shirts should be tucked in. The tags are positioned on either side of the hips and teams are distinguished by the colour of the tags they wear.

**Note :** Belts should be firmly fastened to avoid unnecessary movement during a "tag", with any surplus length of belt being tucked securely out of the way for safety.

## Object of the Game

To score a try by placing the ball with downward pressure on or behind the opponents 'goal line'.

**Note :** A try is worth one point so youngsters can keep score easily.

## Number of Players

This is flexible and can be as many as 15-a-side. However it is suggested that teams of between 4 and 7 a-side helps to encourage maximum involvement and activity.

## Duration of Play

For 7 a-side games it is suggested that two halves of seven minutes each are played with 1 minute for half time.

**Note:** For young players it sometimes helps to play in the same direction for the whole match to avoid confusion.

## Size of Pitch

4 games of 4 or 5 a-side can be played on a typical school soccer / rugby pitch building up to 2 games of 7 a-side each across half a pitch. 12 to 15 a-side games can be played on a full pitch.

**Note :** Posts are not required to play tag rugby.



# The Five Basic Laws for Tag Rugby

## Law 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 a try is scored by players merely running over the goal line with the ball).

After a try has been scored the game restarts from the centre of the field with a tap and pass, by the non scoring team (see law 4).

## Law 2

### Passing

No forward passes are allowed and will be penalised by a tap and pass being given to the non-offending team. 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 can often be the most effective pass.



## Law 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 or guard or shield their tags in any way

**Note :** Defenders should keep their head to the side or behind the ball carriers body for safety

- The defender then holds the tag above their head and shouts 'tag' for all to hear. They must step back at least one metre from the ball carrier allowing space for them to pass

**Note :** When there is a referee it is helpful if they shout 'pass' as a tag is made

- Defenders are not allowed to snatch the ball from the players hands
- 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. Players are however only allowed one step to score a try after being tagged

**Note :** Players can pass in the act of stopping

- Immediately after the pass has been made the defender must then present the tag back to the tackled player. The defender can take no further part in the game until they have returned the tag. Giving the tag back simulates time taken up by defenders when tackling in full contact rugby and stops defenders being unrealistically active as happens in some forms of touch rugby. It also maintains space for the attacking team
- It is important that players make a habit of remembering to receive back their tags as no player can take any further part in the game without both tags properly in place on their belt

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

## Law 4

### Tap and Pass

- A tap and 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 where an infringement took place

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





- At a tap and pass the ball is held in two hands and on the instruction "Play" by the referee the player taps the ball with his foot and passes the ball to a team mate. (Where there is no referee the instruction 'play' is given by the opposing team captain)
- The player making a tap and pass must pass the ball and not just pick it up and run themselves
- The ball must be passed through the air and not taken from the hands of the first player
- To ensure safe practice the receiver of a tap and pass should start from no more than 2 metres behind the passer
- The opposition cannot start moving forward until the player has tapped the ball
- At a tap and pass the opposition must be 10 metres back

## Law 5

### Ball out of Play

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

Youngsters who understand these 5 basic laws can successfully play a simple form of tag rugby. As players gain in experience and their skill levels and understanding of the game develop the following laws could be gradually introduced at the discretion of the teacher or coach.

## Part 2 - Further Laws for Beginners

### A. Knock-on's

A knock-on occurs when a player attempting to catch the ball fumbles it and knocks it forwards to the ground in the direction of the opponents try line. If a knock-on occurs the non-offending team are awarded a tap and pass.



### B. Offside

This law can be introduced at an early stage to allow some flow to a game and develop good habits for the future. Offside only occurs immediately after a tag has been made. In simple terms, once a tag has been made all defenders must make an effort to get back on their side of the ball and not deliberately stand offside blocking the pass or waiting for an interception. Offside is penalised by awarding a tap and pass to the non-offending team.

**Note :** Where defenders find themselves accidentally offside at a 'tag' they should be encouraged to get back onside as quickly as possible or duck right down to allow the pass to be made. They must not block, intercept or interfere with the pass in any way.

It tends to be the defenders standing offside and within 3 metres of the ball carrier who need penalising the most. Where defenders are offside but not interfering with play, then play can continue which allows the game to flow.





## C. Advantage Law

As players become familiar with the laws teachers should be encouraged to introduce the 'advantage' law to create continuity, quick reactions, maximum activity and participation.

The advantage laws says that play should continue even when a law has been broken if the non offending team has gained a tactical or territorial advantage.

## D. Number of Tags ('Tackles')

It is suggested that with beginners there are no set number of tags. Understandably this often results in young players running as far as they can trying to avoid being tagged rather than thinking about passing to supporting team mates who may be in a better position.

However, once skill levels have developed, the team in possession of the ball could have a set number of consecutive tags to score a try, which encourages players to pass to support players before being tagged. This number could be say 2, 3 or 4 depending on the ability of the group. Failure to score a try after this set number of tags results in the opposition gaining possession with a free pass. This free pass is taken from the spot where the final tag was made.

**Note:** Referees or the defending team captain could call these numbers out when players are tagged instead of shouting "pass".

A 'tag' is only counted when the ball is still in the hands of a player at the time the ribbon is removed.

# Things to Avoid

## No Contact

Strictly no contact or grabbing a player's clothing



## No Kicking

Kicking is not allowed in Tag Rugby



## No Diving on the Ball

Players are not allowed to dive on a loose ball but instead must remain on their feet to play it



## No Hand Offs

No hand offs on the body or face

OR

To swipe a defenders hand away to stop them taking your tags



## No Deliberate Barging into Defenders

To ensure safety and encourage evasive skills the ball carrier and the defender should attempt to avoid contact with each other at all times.

When any of the tag rugby laws are broken, a tap and pass is awarded to the other team at the place where the infringement took place, or 5 metres out from the goal line if the infringement was over the goal line or within 5 metres of it.



## Part 3: Further Laws for More Experienced Players

Tag Rugby can be developed with more experienced players to include lineouts, scrums, kicking and the mini maul.

### The Lineout

Players from both teams are allowed to jump and compete for the ball but there is no contact allowed and once the ball is caught no other players may challenge for it.

### The Scrum

These are to be uncontested providing the players have previously been taught the appropriate techniques and safe practice for scrummage. All laws of the game pertaining to the U19 variations for scrummage and off side will apply.

### The Mini Maul

When used properly, the Mini Maul is an effective way for the more experienced players to suck in defenders and create space elsewhere for the attacking team. When playing the mini maul option the ball carrier when tagged can either pass as before or keep hold of the ball and turn their back to the opposition, indicating they are setting up a mini maul situation. At a mini maul a team mate must engage with the ball carrier within 3 second and take the ball. they now have two options. Firstly to pass the ball immediately or secondly remain in close contact with each other and walk the mini maul forward, slowly and under control. they can continue to do this until such time as two defenders also come in and join the maul. At this point the mini maul must stop and the ball be passed within 3 seconds. Referees should be encouraged to help players to release the ball quickly by calling out "play it".

Note:

- For safety, defenders must also join the maul in a safe and controlled manner. (Any player, from either team, deemed not to be in control should be penalised with a free pass awarded against them)
- Defenders must enter the maul from an onside position, i.e. join it from their side
- It is the number of defenders that can stop a mini maul and not the action of the defender(s) who must remain passive throughout
- Any two defenders can join the mini maul. It does not have to include the defending player who made the original tag although it normally will

- Only after the ball has been passed from the mini maul does the defender hand back the tag to the original ball carrier
- To avoid static play encourage players to release the ball just before the mini maul stops moving forward
- As a variation and to learn new techniques the coach can ask the second attacking player in the mini maul to set up a ruck situation by placing the ball on the ground





## Part 4 - General Principles of Play

As stated these are general principles and there may be certain circumstances in a game where they may not strictly apply.

### 1. Go Forward

In attack and defence

#### In attack:

Those in possession of the ball should normally look to run forwards to the goal line and not sideways to the touchlines.

Remember: If nobody in the team ever goes forward with the ball then the team will never score.

#### In defence:

When defending try to deny the opponents time and space by moving forward and tagging the opposition as close to their goal line.



### 2. Support the Ball Carrier at all Times

Close support of the ball carrier allows more options in attack and means possession can be maintained. Close support also means no ground needs to be lost by having to pass the ball a long way backwards to a team mate. Remember a pass directly sideways is allowed and can often be the most effective pass.

Note: Passing before being tagged enables the players to follow their pass and possibly receive a return pass to continue the attack. It also helps to disrupt the oppositions defence and create attacking space and overlap (2 versus 1) situations.

### 3. Run at Spaces not Defenders

However, if the ball carrier has no space in front of them they should look for a team mate who is in space and attempt to move the ball to them quickly so they can exploit it.



## Notes

**"Rugby is not all about running through people, it's about using space, deft handling, good footwork and speed, and tag rugby has got all that"**

**Andy Nicol, Glasgow and Scotland**

**"I like tag rugby because youngsters enjoy running, passing and scoring, and that's what it's all about"**

**Bryan Easson, SRU Development Officer**

**"It's a game you could introduce at 5 or 6 and you could still possibly be playing when you are 50 or 60"**

**Grant McKelvey, SRU Development Officer**

# Further Information

**For further information consult the following SRU publications and videos:**

- **Ford Tag Rugby Video**
- **New Image Rugby for 5-14. A Teachers Resource Pack**
- **New Image Rugby Video**
- **Mini Rugby Manual**
- **"Safe and Secure - Young People in Sport" Leaflet (Sports Scotland)**
- **SRU Coaching Cards**
- **SRU Child Protection Guidelines and Advice Card**

**For further information on Tag Rugby, rugby coaching, educational resources and SRU Development Officers, contact:**

## **The Coaching Office**

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## **Or the Scottish Rugby Union Offices:**

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### **Edinburgh District**

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