



**NEW ZEALAND
RUGBY LEAGUE
REFEREE
GUIDELINES
2026**



TACKLE AND PLAY THE BALL

A player in possession is tackled:

Grounded

a 'when he is held by one or more opposing players and the ball or the hand or arm holding the ball comes into contact with the ground.'

Upright

b 'when he is held by one or more opposing players in such a manner that he can make no further progress and cannot part with the ball.'

Succumbing

c 'when, being held by an opponent, the tackled player makes it evident that he has succumbed* to the tackle and wishes to be released in order to play-the-ball.'

**Succumb includes a player in possession being lifted off the ground and resulting in the calling of held by the Referee*

Hand on player

d 'When he is lying on the ground and an opponent places a hand on him.' Section 11 (2) (a-d)

At the completion of the tackle

The player in possession:

shall be immediately released' by the defender and/or defenders.

Methods that impede the immediate release of the player in possession

- a** Flop onto the player in possession who is grounded
- b** Working the player in possession
- c** Leg pulls
- d** Leaving or placing the hands or arms on the ball or the arms of the player in possession once the tackle is complete
- e** Spinning on the player in possession once the tackle is complete
- f** Defenders 'peeling off' the player in possession^
- g** Climbing over the player in possession once the tackle is complete
- h** Crowding the player in possession once the tackle is complete using their knees, arms or body
- I** Pulls the player in possession to the ground once the tackle is complete.

In a tackle involving two or more defenders, after the tackle is complete, all defenders must release simultaneously.



Defenders Responsibilities

- » At the completion of the tackle the defenders must take up a position as a Marker or retire the 10 metres.
- » A Marker must take up a position directly 'opposite the tackled player' and not float or be too deep from the play the ball.
- » The Marker 'must not kick the ball' whilst it is being played
- » A second Marker 'must stand immediately and directly behind' the first marker. Section 11 (10) (f).

Surrender Tackle

Occurs when the player in possession surrenders his run in or at the line.

Defender[s] are permitted to work the player on the ground, move to a bear hug position, lay on the player in possession or spin to the front of the tackle.

It is the sole responsibility of the Referee to identify this tackle.

If a player surrenders, he cannot be lifted or dragged into touch or in-goal.

The referee is the sole judge of this type of tackle and will call "surrender".

Shoulder Charge

Is where a defender does not use, or attempt to use, his arms (including his hands) to tackle or otherwise take hold of the opposing player and the contact is forceful.

Indicators will include:

1. Rotation of the defender's hips and shoulders
2. Defender has tucked his arm into his body.
3. No genuine attempt to make a tackle.

A shoulder charge is made when a tackling player uses his shoulder and/or upper arm without at the same time using

his arms to tackle or otherwise take hold of the opposing player. The term 'arms' obviously includes hands.

The requirement to use 'the arms' means that both arms must be used, unless both arms are used, then providing the

actions of the player are at least careless, any case involving forceful contact that has been primarily generated by

the shoulder and/or upper arm of the tackling player, will be a shoulder charge. It will be considered misconduct if any

player effects a tackle in the manner as defined.

Mid Air Tackle

It is illegal to tackle an opposing player attempting to field a kick on the full whilst the player is in mid-air. The catcher must have returned to the ground before being tackled.

Third Man In

When a player in possession is held in an upright position by two defenders, any other defender[s] must make initial contact to the player in possession above the knees/knee joint.

Regardless of the point of impact, a player can still be penalised for any 'forceful, dangerous or unnecessary contact' at the legs that involves an unacceptable risk of injury to the player in possession.

In relation to this type of tackle, the Referees will call 'held' and then 'release'.



Tackling a Kicker

When effecting a tackle on a kicker, the defender must make a genuine attempt to tackle which is not:

- 1 Late
- 2 High and/or not a genuine attempt to make a tackle.
- 3 Places kicker in a dangerous position.

Responsibilities of the player in possession

The tackled player shall:

- a *without delay regain his feet where he is tackled,*
- b *lift, the ball clear of the ground,*
- c *face, his opponent's goal line*
- d *place the ball on the ground,*

and make a genuine attempt to play the ball with the foot while maintaining his balance.

Player in possession returning to the mark.

If the player in possession simultaneously offloads the ball or continues to run after the tackle is complete,

the Referee will direct the player in possession back to the original position to play the ball. Section 11 (6) notes.

Dummy Half Passing Ball into Defending Player at Ruck

Where a dummy half deliberately passes the ball into a defender caught in and around the ruck who is not actively taking part in the play, such an act will be deemed to be contrary to the true spirit of the game and constitute misconduct under section 15 (1) (i) of the Laws of the Game, and a penalty will be awarded against the attacking team.

This does not in any way absolve a defender of his responsibilities to clear the ruck and defending team will be penalised if it is deemed that they are interfering with play.

Stealing the Ball.

- a) The ball can be stolen from the player in possession at any stage prior to the tackle being complete when there is only one defender effecting the tackle.
- b) If there are two or more defenders(s) effecting the tackle, irrespective of whether all but one 'drops off' the tackle, and the ball is subsequently taken from the tackled player and the ball is stolen and the ball is stolen a penalty should be awarded against the player or players effecting the tackle except if the player in possession is attempting to ground the ball for a try.



10 METRES

All defending players except those who have taken up a position as Marker[s] must *'retire 10 metres from the point at which the ball is played or to their own goal line'*.

All defending players are required to be 'in line' with the Referee marking the 10 metres.

If the defensive line is within 10 metres of their own goal line, the players:

- 1 Must be touching the goal line with a foot; and
- 2 The defenders cannot place their front foot past the centre of the ruck.

If the referee is using "Hold" and "Go" calls to assist the defensive lines. The "go" call is made when the ball is clear of the ruck. If a referee uses "hold" they follow up with a "go" call.

The Referee will call 'go' when the ball has been played backwards and the defensive line is entitled to move forward.

Offside

A player is offside if he has one foot (either on or off the ground) in front of a teammate who *'last touches, is touched, held or kicked the ball'*.

In relation to kick, an active offside player shall not encroach within ten metres of the ball, when there is an opponent waiting for the ball.

Active or Passive

Active is:

An offside player who takes part in and/or influences the course of the game.

Passive is:

An offside player who does not influence the course of the game.

Waiting for the ball

A player from the non-kicking team who is moving in the direction of the ball and who can actively participate in play.

Where an onside player takes possession of the ball, an offside teammate who is within 10 metres of opponent(s) 'waiting for the ball' may participate in the play when the onside player and/or the ball itself travel 10 metres or more (this includes if the ball is kicked a second time).

Kick

Making an intentional motion to kick the ball with any part of the leg (except the heel) from knee to toe inclusive'. An indicator is a change to the normal running gait.

Out of Play

A player from the team in possession is out of play if he does not "retire behind his own players involved in the play the ball or to their own goal line."

An 'out of play' player(s) may again participate in the play if he retreats to a position where he has a foot behind the point where the ball was placed on the ground in the prior play the ball.

Where an 'out of play' player becomes involved in the ensuing play, he is to be penalised with the penalty being awarded in line with the previous play the ball, at the point where the player became out of play.



Downtown Chasers

A player is considered downtown when:

A player who is in front of the kicker in general play who intentionally advances beyond the point of the previous play the ball before the ball has gone past him.

SCRUMS

A scrum is to be formed and decided by:

- 1 The front row *'interlock arms and heads and creating a tunnel'*
- 2 The second-row forwards *'interlock arms and placing their heads in the two spaces between the hooker and his front row forwards'*
- 3 The loose forward (lock) *'shall pack behind his second rowers by placing his head in the space between them' and wrap their arms around the second-row forwards'*
- 4 All players outside the scrum, other than the scrum halves shall retire ten metres or more behind the mark where the scrum is formed and shall remain until the ball has emerged correctly from the scrum.
- 5 The ball is to be fed on the same side as the Referee into the tunnel by the scrum half who must stand square with both hands on the ball.
- 6 *'The ball must emerge from the scrum after first emerging from between and behind the inner feet of the second-row forwards. This will be indicated by the Referee calling 'out'. Section 12 (2-9)*

No Scrum Clocks

There are no scrum clocks.

However, if one team is properly bound and packed then the Referee can call "time off". This team must hold this formation until such time as:

- (a) The Referee indicates that they may stand; or
- (b) The opposing team packs and the scrum is formed.

Time is called back on once the scrum is packed and the Referee signals time back on.



PLAYER MISCONDUCT

A player is guilty of misconduct if he:

- 1 *'Trips, kicks or strikes another player.'*
- 2 *'When affecting or attempting to affect a tackle makes contact with the head or neck of an opponent intentionally, recklessly or carelessly.'*
- 3 *Drops knees first onto an opponent who is on the ground.*
- 4 *Uses any dangerous throw when affecting a tackle.*
- 5 *Deliberately and continuously breaks the Laws of the Game*
- 6 *Uses offensive or obscene language.*
- 7 *'Disputes a decision of the Referee or Touch Judge'.*
- 8 *Re-enters the field of play without permission of the Referee or a Touch Judge having previously temporarily retired from the game.*
- 9 *Behaves in a way contrary to the true spirit of the game.*
- 10 *Unnecessarily contacts a player not in possession or a kicker (see tackled and play the ball)*
- 11 *Uses a shoulder charge (see Tackle and Play the ball)*
- 12 *Intentionally dives at the no- kicking team of an opponent.*
- 13 *Tackles a player who leaps into the air to retrieve a kick and whose feet have not returned to the ground.*
- 14 *When a tackler dives at and makes contact with the lower leg of a ball carrier without using his/her arms (known as grasscutter)*
- 15 *Applies any unnecessary pressure or twists including grapples, crushers or performs a chicken wing on a player in possession.*
- 16 *Shoulder charge*
- 17 *Disputes a decision of the Referee or Touch Judge.*

In these circumstances:

'A penalty kick shall be awarded against any player who is guilty of misconduct (Section 15) provided that this is not to the disadvantage of the non-offending team.'

Additionally a Referee may:

'In the event of misconduct by a player at his discretion, caution, temporarily suspend for ten minutes (Sin Bin) or dismiss the player.'

If an incident is significant enough a Referee will also place the player or incident on report.



Sin Bin

The six main reasons for a player to be temporarily suspended for ten minutes are:

- 1 Repeated infringement
- 2 Professional Foul
- 3 Cooling off period for a player
- 4 Dissent
- 5 Striking
- 6 Foul Play*

A player will be sin binned for foul play in circumstances where, in the opinion of the Referee the act of foul play is of a serious nature but does not warrant sending off. Acts of foul play of a serious nature includes:

- High Tackles with direct contact with the head or neck which are deemed forceful.
- Dangerous Throws in which the head or neck of the attacking player makes forceful contact with the ground.
- Shoulder charges which make forceful contact with the head or neck of the attacking player or make forceful movement of the head or neck of the attacking player (whiplash).
- Crusher tackles in which a defending player has a grip/hold of the attacking player with both arms and applies unnecessary pressure or force to the head/neck/spinal column of the player.
- Any other act of foul play which the Referee deems to be of a serious nature but does not warrant sending off.

Captains Communication

A Captain may only approach the Referee at an appropriate time and in an appropriate manner. We encourage referees to apply common sense to this guideline.



RESTARTS OF PLAY

Penalty or Free Kick

When awarding a penalty, the referee should complete the process for all penalties ie. blow penalty, signal offence and give the team the 'mark' (ensuring all players from the team awarded the penalty are onside).

A referee cannot allow a player to take a free kick before this process has been completed.

Goal Line Drop Out

Touch in goal

The ball is touch in goal when it touches the corner post, in goal line or any object on or outside the touch in goal line

A player is NOT considered to be an 'object'.

'Where the ball which is stationary in the in-goal area comes into contact with a player in touch-in goal or over the dead ball line, the ball is deemed to have been made dead by that player.

'a kick in general play is made dead by a defending player straddling the dead ball line or touch-in goal line, other than being caught on the full'.

The non-kicking team must allow the ball to bounce on the ground on or outside of the dead ball line and/or touch in goal lines for it to be made dead by the kicking team, otherwise play will be restarted with a goal line drop out.

Drop Out Clock

There are no drop out clocks.

A drop out may be taken once all officials are in position and all players from the kicking team are onside.

20 Metre Restart

The 20-metre optional kick must only be taken when all officials are in position on the 30-metre line and the whistle is blown. The initial tackle effected on the team taking the 20-metre optional re-start shall be a zero tackle.

A "quick tap" will not be permitted where the ball has been returned to the 20-metre line by being passed greater than 10 metres, or has been passed more than once, or has been kicked.

Kick Off

A kick off may only be taken when all officials are in position.

40/20 Kick

Where a player kicks the ball in general play bounded by their own dead ball line, 40 metre lines and touchlines and the ball finds touch, otherwise than on the full, at a point on the touchline between the opponents 20 metre line and the goal line, the kickers team shall recommence play with a tap kick. Glossary Page 7.

The tap kick will be taken 20 metres in from the touchline and in line with where the ball first crossed the touchline but no closer than 10 metres from the goal line.

The tap kick may only be taken when the Referee blows his whistle to restart play.

Prior to blowing the whistle the Referees will give the defending team a 'reasonable time' to get into position. This will only occur when all match officials are in position and ready to officiate.



Kick Out on the Full.

A handover shall occur when the ball is kicked directly into touch on the full.

The handover will occur at the point where the ball was kicked from, but no closer than 10 metres from the goal line and no closer than 10 metres from the touch line.

In the event that the ball goes into touch on the full behind the point at which it was kicked, play will recommence with a handover in line with where it crossed the touchline, no closer than 10 metres from the touchline or goal line. The play-the-ball to recommence play shall not be counted for the purposes of the tackle count.

Mutual Infringement.

Where play is irregularly affected by a mutual infringement:

- a) Following a play, the ball, the Referee shall re-start play by returning to the point of the previous play-the-ball and allowing the team which was in possession at that point to play the ball again. The play-the-ball to restart the game is not counted as an additional tackle and the player who was previously tackled with the ball immediately prior to the mutual infringement is to play the ball to restart the game.
- b) Following a scrum, the Referee shall restart play by returning to the point where the scrum was set and giving the team in possession at that point the loose head and feed.
- c) Following a penalty restart, the Referee shall re-start play by returning to the point where the penalty was awarded and ruling that the penalty restart be re-taken.
- d) Following a goal line or 20 metres drop-out, the Referee shall re-start play by returning to the point where the drop-out was taken and ruling that the drop-out be retaken.
- e) Following a 20-metre optional kick, the Referee shall re-start play by returning to the point where the 20-metre optional kick was taken and ruling that the 20-metre optional kick be re-taken.
- f) Following a kick off, the Referee shall re-start play by returning to the point where the kick off was taken and ruling that the kick off, be re-taken.

If in any of the above circumstances, there is a turnover in possession prior to the mutual infringement occurring, the Referee shall re-start play by awarding a zero tackle re-start where the mutual infringement occurred (or 10 metres out from the goal line if the mutual infringement occurred in the in-goal) to the team in possession at the time.

The Referee is the sole judge of what constitutes a mutual infringement and whether or not play has been irregularly affected. Contact between a defender and Referee may not constitute a mutual infringement.

SCORING A TRY

Scoring a Try

A try is scored when:

- a *A player first grounds the ball in his opponents in goal*
 - b *Opposing players simultaneously grounds the ball in the in-goal area*
 - c *A tackled player's momentum carries him into the opponents in goal where he grounds the ball. Section 6 (3)*
- (c)



Grounding

Grounding the Ball includes:

- a *Placing the ball on the ground with hand or hands, wrist or forearm.*
- b *Exerting a downward pressure on the ball in contact with the ground*
- c *Dropping on the ball and covering it with the front part of the body above the waist and below the neck.*

A player who has had possession or touches/touched the ball and knocks the ball forward must regain possession (catch, hold or grip) prior to the ball hitting the ground, another player, goal post or cross bar.

For the ball to be deemed grounded, pressure must be applied by the player's fingers, hand, wrist, forearm or torso so as to create a reasonable influence on the plane of the ball including the spin, rotation, momentum or bounce.

Double Movement

A try will be awarded if:

'a tackled player's momentum carries him into the opponents' in-goal where he grounds the ball even if the ball has first touched the ground in the field of play'. Section 6 (3) (c)

In the process of scoring a try a player in possession must not promote the ball from the position the ball has been grounded.

If the momentum of the player in possession carries him into the opponents in goal area, it will not be a double movement if the ball would have finished over the goal line regardless of any subsequent movement of the ball or the arm carrying the ball.

Penalty Try

Further, if circumstances warrant it:

*'The Referee may award a penalty try if, in his opinion, a try **would** have been scored but for the unfair play of the defending team. A penalty try is awarded between the goal posts irrespective of where the offence occurred.*



Possible Eight Point Try

If a player fouls an opponent who is touching down for a try, a penalty kick at goal shall be taken from in front of the goal posts after the attempt to convert the try.

Touching down includes:

- A** In the act of scoring; and
- b** Until the try scorer regains his feet.

Grounding the Ball in own In Goal

For the ball to be deemed dead the player in possession must intentionally ground the ball in his own in-goal.

Corner Post

If a player makes contact with a corner post he will not be deemed to be out of play unless any part of his body makes contact with either the touch-in-goal line or the touch line or the ground beyond.

If the ball is not in possession of a player and it makes contact with the corner post (e.g. from a kick) the ball will be deemed to be touch-in-goal as per section 9(2).

If in the act of scoring the ball in possession of the player touches the corner post the try will be disallowed.

OBSTRUCTION

Obstruction

The indicators for an obstruction include:

- 1** (a) 'Block' or 'Flat' runner[s] (who do not receive the ball) must not stop in the middle of the defensive line
 - (b) 'Block' or 'Flat' runner[s] (who do not receive the ball) must not run at (chest or outside shoulder of) defender[s] and initiate contact.
 - (c) The Referee can determine the significance of contact initiated by the 'Block' or 'Flat' runner[s] (who does not receive the ball) in impeding a defender's involvement in a try scoring play.
- 2** Ball Carriers must not run behind an active 'Block' or 'Flat' runner[s] and disadvantage the defensive line.
- 3** It will be deemed obstruction if the attacking players run a 'Sweep' line clearly receive the ball on the inside of the 'Block' or 'Flat' runner[s]
- 4** Defensive decisions that commit defender[s] to initiating contact with an attacking player(s) will not be deemed obstruction.
- 5** Defensive decisions that commit defender[s] to change their defensive line will not be deemed obstruction.

**Block runners run lines towards an opposition goal line and are committed to receiving the ball close to the defensive line*

**Sweep runners run lines in an arc across the field behind a block runner*



The Wall

If two or more players form a wall (side by side) next to the play the ball and don't allow the opportunity for a defending player to move directly towards the player in possession, the referee will penalise for obstruction.

Escorts

A player is not to *'deliberately obstruct an opponent who is not in possession'*.

It will be interpreted to be an obstruction, in regards to a player catching the ball from a kick if:

- 1 A player arrives at the same time as an opponent and obstructs him deliberately, or
- 2 Deliberately runs an opponent off the ball.

This applies to both the kicking and non-kicking teams.

It will NOT be considered an obstruction in regards to a player catching the ball from a kick if:

- 1 A defending player moves directly towards the ball; and
- 2 Takes up a position prior to the ball being caught.

Driving Through the Ruck

If, in the process of scoring a try, an attacking player dives through the ruck or into a teammate including the player who played the ball and impacts on the defence, he will be penalised for an obstruction.

Sleeper

An attacking player who loiters next to the play the ball area and who causes an obstruction will be penalised.

Lending Weight

It is permissible for a player to *'lend weight to a teammate in possession in order to avoid losing ground'*.

- 1 It is not permissible for the player lending weight to impede a defender from making the tackle.
- 2 The Referee will take into account any momentum the tackle has already generated.
- 3 Once you lend weight to an attacking player the tackle is complete.

