



***Game Management  
Guidelines  
08.2009  
v.01***



## *Game Management Guidelines 2009*

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### *Introduction*

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USA Rugby Referees' management has established guidelines to refereeing at all levels in USA Rugby. These guidelines enable players and referees to have a clearer approach to the game, to enable consistency in Law application throughout the country. They also reflect directives from the IRB, particularly in relation to the tackle/ruck, and players staying on their feet.

The guidelines were first established for the USA Rugby Super League in 2008, and upon its success, it has been further developed for the 2009 season, and then for the Women's Premier League 2009.

These guidelines are to be distributed and applied nationally to all referees, referee observers, referee coaches, players/teams, coaches and administrators.

**Ed Todd**  
*Referee Manager*  
*USA Rugby*

**Richard Every**  
*National Panel Manager*  
*USA Rugby*



## Game Management Guidelines 2009

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*Appropriate U19 Law Variations are in green italicized text.*



***The Principles of the Game***

*“It is through discipline, control and mutual respect that the spirit of the game flourishes and, in the context of a game as physically challenging as rugby, these are the qualities which forge the fellowship and sense of fair play so essential to the game’s ongoing success and survival.”*

It is imperative that we, as a community, stand together and work together to grow rugby in the United States. It will be through mutual respect and support that we develop the game.

We urge that players and team administrators do not verbally abuse the officials, and vice versa, nor make any derogatory public remarks or comments, as this behavior is not beneficial to the development and growth of the game.

It is important that officials, players, coaches, etc. share their thoughts and experiences with one another for the betterment of all.

**Tackle/Ruck**

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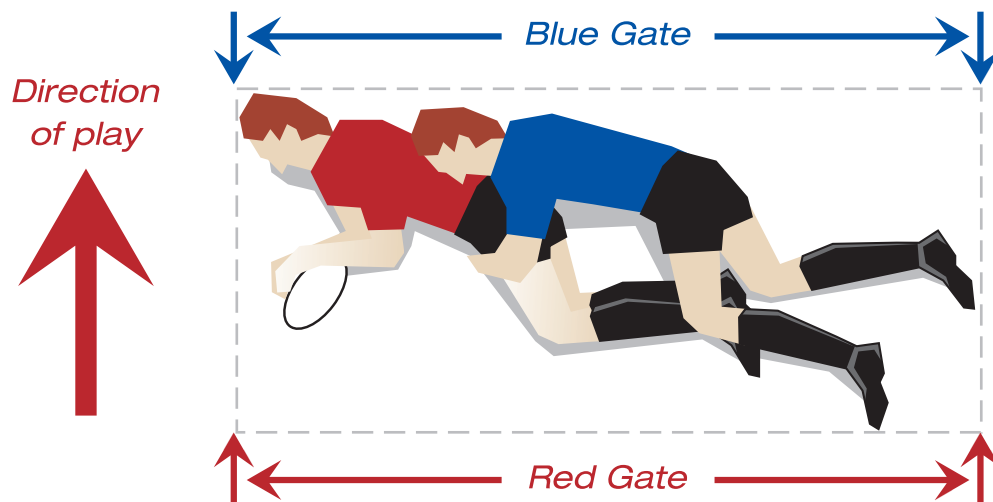
**A. The Tackle**

1. Tacklers have to release the tackled player immediately, and move away or get to their feet. **PK**
2. Tackled player must exercise their options immediately. **PK**
3. Players that slow the ball down should be penalized immediately. **PK**
4. Referees may instruct the players, i.e. “release the ball”, “roll away”, etc., as long as these players have not already slowed down ball availability.

Referees are to approach a low tolerance level at the breakdown and should penalize early in the match to establish compliance. **PK**

**B. The Gate**

1. All players have to enter the tackle through the gate, referred to as a square entry, shoulders parallel to the goal lines. No part of a player’s body (including the arms), may enter the tackle through any other area. **PK**
2. Failure to enter through the gate should not be tolerated. **PK**



Overhead view, Blue tackled Red. Players are only allowed square entry through their indicated gate area.

**C. Arriving players**

1. Players are to enter the tackle on their feet, and remain on their feet. **PK**
2. At a tackle, arriving players are allowed to play the ball with their hands after an opposition player binds onto them, if:
  - a. They arrive at the tackle legally,
  - b. Remain on their feet, and
  - c. Have possession of the ball (i.e. was grasping/holding the ball) prior to the contact occurring.
 NOTE: Thus, a ruck has not yet formed.
3. No players may bind onto the tackler/tackled player who is on the ground. **PK**
4. Players who secure the ball without their weight fully on their feet (i.e. bound on OR leaning on the tackler/tackled player on the ground) OR who go to ground head first, or dive over players on the ground, OR dive over players on the ground with the ball between them should not be tolerated and penalized. **PK**



**X** *Red tackled Blue, Blue player arrived at the tackle on their feet, through the gate, but is binding on the tackler/tackled player on the ground to secure possession.*



**X** *Blue tackled Red, Red player has secured possession by binding onto the tackler/tackled player on the ground. This is NOT allowed.*

**Tackle**

5. If players enter the tackle in conformance with the required criteria and subsequently go to ground during the process of removing a tackler or because the opposition was unable to retain its position at contact, these players should not be penalized because they did not willfully go to ground. The ball should be available to be played. If these players obstruct the ball from being available to be played, they should be penalized. **PK**

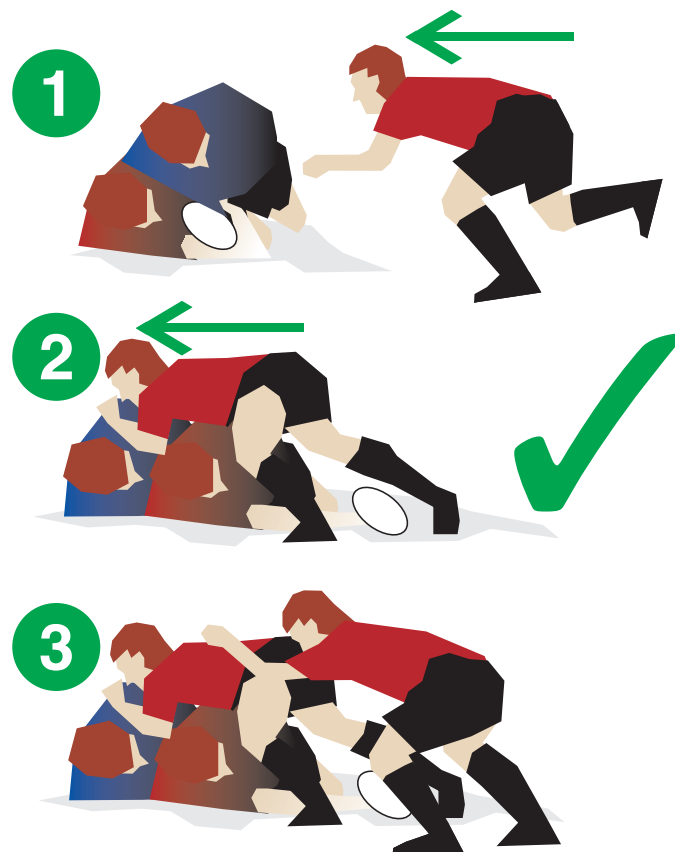


*Red tackled Blue, Blue player arrived at the tackle on their feet, through the gate, is NOT binding on players on the ground, remaining on their feet and preparing for contact at the tackle area, as seen in the example to the right.*



*Red tackled Blue, both players that arrived at the tackle are on their feet, through the gate, and are contesting for possession.*

6. If players enter the tackle in conformance with the required criteria (through the gate, with their body position correct, i.e. back parallel to the ground or shoulders above hips - NOT DOWNWARD shoulders below hips - and with their weight on their feet) and make contact with the tackler or tackled player and subsequently goes to ground during the process, BUT HAS MADE THE BALL AVAILABLE TO BE IMMEDIATELY PLAYED, will be allowed. Arriving players of the team who have secured the ball may either play the ball or bind onto their players, even if their players are on the ground, to maintain possession.



*[1] Blue tackled Red. The RED players arrive, through the gate, with their body position correct (back parallel to the ground or upward - NOT DOWNWARD - with their weight on their feet), makes contact with the Blue tackler, and [2] subsequently go to ground, AND HAVE MADE THE BALL AVAILABLE TO BE PLAYED. Red players who arrive thereafter may [3] bind onto their players (that are on the ground) to maintain possession already secured.*

**D. The Ruck**

1. Referees are to communicate immediately when a ruck has formed, by using the term “Ruck, No Hands”. This communication is essential, and should be used at every ruck formed, and may be repeated.



**A. Mark and Engagement**

1. The referee will make the mark indicating the center of the scrum to the two hookers.
2. Engagement protocol is four separate instructions, “Crouch, Touch, Pause, Engage”.
3. Front rows should not crouch until they are ready.
4. “Touch” means a full extended arm, touching, with the hand, the opposing prop on the shoulder and withdrawing their arms (holding onto the opposition player prior to engagement is not allowed).
5. Teams are required to ensure they maintain their position (hold their weight) upon engagement.
6. Early engagement, failure to engage, and standing up should not be tolerated and be penalized, by Free Kick, or a Penalty Kick if the referee deems it to be deliberate, dangerous and/or a repeated infringement.  
**FK**
7. #8 is to bind on the locks’ body with at least one arm up to the shoulder prior to engagement. *U19: #8 is required to bind between the two locks.*

NOTE: The engagement process has been implemented to maintain safety. If at any point, the process is not followed by players the referee should blow the whistle, and restart the engagement procedure OR penalize the players if they repeatedly do not comply.

**B. Set and Feed**

1. Scrum is to remain stationary until the feed. **FK**
2. Scrum feed should be straight into the tunnel between the front rows.  
**FK**

**C. Wheel**

1. A scrum has only wheeled through 90° if the line between the front rows has gone through 90°. *U19: Intentional wheel is not allowed. PK Unintentional wheel through 45° to be reset.*
2. A whip-wheel is not allowed - this is when the scrum turns/spins on its axis. The wheel has to occur with a forward motion for it to be legal (and not dangerous). If the referee is unsure as to who has wheeled the scrum (in a whip-wheel), the scrum should be reset with the original team putting the ball in. **PK**



**D. Scrumhalves**

1. Scrumhalves are not to touch/push one another. **PK**
2. Defending scrumhalves are not to position themselves in the 'pocket' area between the flanker and #8, and should be managed by the referee before penalizing. **PK**
3. Defending scrumhalves who decide to take up a defensive position on the last line of feet of their side of the scrum have to start next to their opponent at the put-in (scrum feed), and then move to the last line of feet once the scrum has commenced. They need not remain close to the scrum and may roam across the field, behind the last line of feet of their players in the scrum. If they choose not to be next to their opponent at the put-in, their offside line is the same as for players not participating in the scrum which is 5m behind the last line of feet of their scrum. **PK**
4. The scrumhalf who's team has possession of the ball after the scrum has commenced, must also remain onside by being on their side of the ball. If they deliberately remain in front of the ball to obstruct the opposing scrumhalf, to allow their #8 to play the ball, they should be penalized. **PK**

*U19: A player must not intentionally keep the ball in the scrum once the player's team has heeled the ball and has control of the ball at the base of the scrum. **FK***

**E. General**

*U19: A team may not push the opposition back more than 1.5m. **FK***



**A. Formation**

1. The defending team has to have a player in the 5m area - if they do not, the referee will instruct them to do so before continuing - this player may not support a jumper in the lineout, and must be 2m from the lineout until it commences.
2. If a team selects to have a player in the receiver (scrumhalf) position, the receiver must be 2m from the lineout.
3. The team that is to throw the ball into the lineout determines the maximum number of players in the lineout. Referees should manage this rather than penalize.

NOTE: Many aspects of lineout infringements, i.e. formation, closing the gap, ball not traveling 5m, early jump, could be managed by referees by resetting rather than penalizing, unless the infringement substantially benefits the offending team, or is continually repeated. **FK**

**B. Support & Obstruction**

1. The immediate players supporting the jumper in the air may NOT position themselves between the jumper and the opposition. **PK**

**C. Quick Throw-In**

1. Referees are to be more aware of quick throw-ins, within law, and that the throw does not have to be straight, but may not be forward, and has to travel 5m.
  - Ball not thrown 5m = opponents' option scrum or lineout
  - Ball prevented from traveling 5m or played before going 5m. **FK**
2. A player that deliberately prevents a quick throw-in from traveling 5m, must be penalized. **FK**
3. Players who hold onto the ball, or throw the ball away, when in touch, to prevent a quick throw-in should be penalized, on the line of touch, 15m line. This should not be tolerated. **PK**

**D. Lineout Start & End**

1. Once the lineout has started, referees are to keep one arm raised to indicate to the defending team that the lineout is in progress, and players who are not part of the lineout need to remain 10m from the line of touch. Only when the lineout is over will the referee lower their arm.

**E. No Maul**

1. If the defenders decide not to engage to form a maul at the lineout, referees should communicate to the team in possession to get the ball out of the group of players, rather than penalize for obstruction.



**Ball Out**

**A. Ruck**

1. The ball is out when there are no bodies over the ball from a bird's eye view.
2. Whilst the competition for the ball in a ruck is ongoing, hands by players in the ruck, are NOT allowed. **PK**
3. Once the ball has been clearly won, pushing the ball back by using the hand, by a player of the team that have won possession of the ball is permissible, AND, digging for the ball, by the player of the team who has won possession of the ball, who is in the scrumhalf position and not part of the ruck, is permissible and the BALL IS NOT OUT.
4. If a player in the scrum half position is not retrieving the ball, but holding the ball, with one or two hands, the BALL IS OUT.
5. Players in the ruck may under no circumstance slap the ball out of the scrumhalf's hands or interfere with the scrumhalf. **PK**

**B. Maul**

1. Players in the maul may under no circumstance slap the ball out of the scrumhalf's hands or interfere with the scrumhalf. **PK**

**C. Scrum**

1. The ball is out when there are no bodies over the ball from a bird's eye view, or it has been handled by a player of the team in possession (scrumhalf), or handled by a player of the team in possession that is no longer part of the scrum.
2. If the #8 detaches from the scrum (both shoulders) with the ball at the feet, and attempts to pick up the ball, the BALL IS OUT.



**A. Pulling the Maul down / Collapsed Maul**

1. Pulling down the maul and/or collapsing the maul is NOT allowed. **PK**

**B. Joining/Leaving/Ending the Maul**

1. A maul is only over when a player carrying the ball, or the ball, leaves the maul, or if a ruck forms (ball goes to ground or ball carrier goes to ground and places the ball on the ground), not when all the defenders leave the maul voluntarily. If a maul has formed, and moving forward, and the defenders leave the maul voluntarily, the team in possession should not be penalized for obstruction, as the maul continues. Defenders who then join the maul again, should do so from the last line of feet.
2. If defenders leave the maul involuntarily or are unable to remain bound, and there are no more defenders attached to the maul, the maul is over and the team in possession should not continue to move forward with their players bound around the ball, as this may constitute obstruction. Referees are to communicate that the maul is over.

NOTE 1: If the team in possession does not comply with the referee's request that the maul is over, and remain bound around the ball carrier they should be penalized. **PK**

NOTE 2: If a maul is moving towards the goal line, and the defenders drop off the maul, prior to the maul reaching the goal line, as they are unable to stop the driving maul, the team in possession should not be penalized for obstruction if they then immediately enter the in-goal area due to the momentum gained from the drive and ground the ball. A try should be awarded.

3. If a maul becomes stationary OR is moving parallel to the goal lines OR is moving backwards, referees will instruct players to "USE IT", and give that team ample opportunity to comply within Law.



**Advantage**

**A. Communication & Signals**

1. Referees will only indicate advantage when there is the possibility that advantage may accrue.
2. When an infringement occurs, referees will indicate that they have seen it, and communicate, i.e. “Knock-on + team color”. Then they will either blow the whistle for the infringement, or play advantage, signal and communicate:

“Scrum Advantage + team color”;

OR

“Penalty Advantage + team color”

2. When advantage is gained, the referee will call “Advantage Over” - there is no signal for advantage over.

**B. No advantage**

1. If the scrum collapses or pops, an immediate whistle is required to prevent injury, whether for penalty or reset.
2. If a player deliberately kills the ball on the ground, no advantage should be applied, unless a clear scoring opportunity or an obvious advantage is likely. That player should be admonished/cautioned in both instances.



**Foul Play**

FOUL PLAY IS NOT WITHIN THE SPIRIT OF THE GAME AND HAS NO PLACE IN RUGBY. IT SHOULD NOT BE TOLERATED.

**A. Tackle**

1. The following are unacceptable:

- Leading with the shoulder (making deliberate contact with the shoulder first, and then wrapping with the arms), or swinging the arm into contact  
**PK and admonishment and/or suspension**
- Not grasping an opponent  
**PK and admonishment and/or suspension**
- Spear tackle (Lifting a player from the ground, turning the body parallel to the ground or more, and driving the player into the ground, whether deliberate or accidental)  
**PK and RED CARD**
- Lifting a player from the ground, turning the body parallel to the ground or more, and throwing the player to the ground  
**PK and RED CARD**
- High tackle (including a chest high tackle where the arm eventually makes contact above the shoulders)  
**PK and admonishment and/or suspension**  
*NOTE: If a player bends down, and is then tackled above the shoulders due to this action, the tackler should be given the benefit of the doubt if their intent was not to tackle high/dangerously*
- Tackling a player in the air  
**PK and admonishment and/or suspension**

**B. Feet on bodies**

Players may not stamp, trample or kick opponents.

**PK and admonishment and/or suspension**



***Foul Play***

**C. General**

1. Deliberate/cynical offenses should result in a suspension.

**PK and suspension**

2. Repeated offenses can be team and/or individual, and should be addressed sooner rather than later.

**PK and admonishment and/or suspension**

3. Cheap shots/off the ball offenses are unacceptable and should result in a suspension.

**PK and suspension**

4. Holding/obstructing players off the ball.

**PK and admonishment and/or suspension**

5. Perpetrators and retaliators are responsible and are to be dealt with - the last offence is to be penalized.

**PK and admonishment and/or suspension**



***Restarts & Open Play***

**14**

1. Players are expected to remain behind the ball at all kick-offs and drop-outs (except quick drop-outs as Law allows). Referees are to manage this phase, however, players are aware that they need to comply.
2. Players who obstruct the opposition from getting to the ball carrier should be penalized. **PK**
3. Players who bind onto their player (that has possession of the ball), and so position themselves between their player and the opposition, are obstructing and should be penalized. **PK**

***Penalty Try***

**Yellow Card**

A penalty try will be accompanied by a yellow card to the offender. A penalty try should only be awarded if a try would have been scored, but for foul play by a defender, if it is prevented, or if a try would have been scored in a better position.