

## **The laws of the game of football as played by the Rugby Football Union**

*[The following is an attempt to present the final draft as approved on 22 June 1871 by the Committee, and on 24 June by a Special General Meeting]*

Laws which are essentially the same as today are in blue (close to half of them). This is obviously a highly subjective decision, and is only made for rough guidance.

1. A drop kick or drop is made by letting the ball fall from the hands and kicking it at the very instant it rises.
2. A place kick or place is made by kicking the ball after it has been placed in a nick made in the ground for the purpose of keeping it at rest.
3. A punt is made by letting the ball fall from the hands and kicking it before it touches the ground.
4. Each goal shall be composed of two upright posts exceeding 11 foot in height from the ground and placed 18 ft 6 inches apart with a cross bar 10 feet from the ground.
5. A goal can only be obtained by kicking the ball from the Field of Play direct (ie without touching the dress or person of any player of either side;) over the Cross bar of the opponents' goal whether it touch such Crossbar or posts or not: but if the ball goes directly it over either of the goal posts it is called a poster and is not a goal.
6. A goal may be obtained from any kind of kick except a punt.
7. A match shall be decided only by a majority of goals.
8. The ball is dead when it rests absolutely motionless on the ground.
9. A touch down is when a player putting his hand upon the ball on the ground in touch or in goal stops it so that it remains dead or fairly so.
10. A tackle is when the holder of the ball is held by one or more players of the opposite side.
11. A scrummage takes place when the holder of the ball being in the field of play puts it down on the ground in front of himself and all who have closed round on their respective sides endeavour to push their opponents back and by kicking the ball to drive it in the direction of the opposite goal line.
12. A player may take up the ball whenever it is rolling or bounding except in a scrummage.
13. It is not lawful to take up the Ball when dead (except in order to bring it out after it has been touched down in touch or in goal) for any purpose whatever - whenever the ball shall have been so unlawfully taken up it shall at once be brought back to where it was so taken up and there put down.
14. In a scrummage it is not lawful to touch the Ball with the hand under any circumstances whatever.
15. It is lawful for any player who has the ball to run with it, and if he does so it is called a run - if a player runs with the ball until he gets behind his opponents goal line and there touches it down, it is called a run in.
16. It is lawful to run in anywhere across the goal line.
17. The goal line is in goal and the touch-line is in touch.
18. In the event of any player holding or running with the ball being tackled and the ball being fairly held he must at once cry down and there put it down.
19. A maul in goal is when the holder of the Ball is tackled inside goal line or being tackled immediately

outside is carried or pushed across it and he or the opposite side or both endeavour to touch the ball down. In all cases the ball when so touched down shall belong to the players of the side who first had possession just before the maul commenced unless the opposite side have gained entire possession of it.

20. In case of a maul in-goal those players only who are touching the ball with their hands when it crosses the goal line may continue in the maul in-goal and when a player has once released his hold of the Ball after it is inside the goal line he may not again join in the maul and if he attempts to do so may be dragged out by the opposite side -

But if a player when running in is tackled inside the goal line then only the player who first tackled him or if two or more tackle him simultaneously they only may join in the maul.

21. Touch in-goal (see plan) Immediately the Ball whether in the hands of a player (except for the purpose of punt out see Rule 29) or not goes into touch in-goal it is at once dead and out of the game of and is brought out as provided by Rules 41 and 42.

22. Every player is on side but is put off side if he enters a scrummage from his opponents' side or being in a scrummage gets in front of the Ball, or when the ball has been kicked, touched or is being run with by any of his own side behind him (i e between himself and his own goal line).

23. Every player when offside is out of the game and shall not touch the ball in any case whatever, either in or out of touch or goal, or in any way interrupt or obstruct any player, until he is again on side.

24. A player being offside is put on side when the ball has been run five yards with or kicked by or has touched the dress or person of any player of the opposite side or when one of his own side has run in front of him.

25. When a player has the Ball none of his opponents who at the time are offside may commence or attempt to run, tackle or otherwise interrupt such player until he has run five yards.

26. Throwing back. It is lawful for any player who has the Ball to throw it back towards his own goal, or to pass it back to any player of his own side who is at the time behind him in accordance with the rules of on side.

27. Knocking on i e deliberately hitting the ball with the hand and Throwing Forward i e throwing the ball in the direction of the opponents' goal line are not lawful, As provided by the next rule the captain of the opposite side may require it to be brought back to the spot whence it was so knocked or thrown forward and there put down..

28. A Fair Catch is a catch made direct from a kick or a throw forward or Knock-on by one of the opponents' side, or from a punt out or a punt on (see Rules 29 and 30) provided the catcher makes a mark with his heel at the spot where he has made the catch and no other of his own side touch the ball. (See Rules 43 & 44)

29. A punt out is a punt made after a touchdown by player from behind his opponents goal line and from touch in-goal if necessary towards his own side who must stand outside the goal line and endeavour to make a fair catch or to get the ball and run in or drop a goal. see 49 and 51

30. A punt on is a punt made in a manner similar to a punt out and from touch if necessary by player who has made a fair catch from a punt out or another punt on.

31. Touch (see plan) If the ball goes into touch the first player on his side who touches it down must bring it to the spot where it crossed the touchline, or if a player when running with the ball cross or put any part of either foot across the touch-line, he must return with the ball to the spot where the line he was so crossed, and from thence return it into the field of play as provided by the following.

32. He must then himself or by one of his own side, either bound it out in the field of play and then run

with it kick it or throw it back to his own side or **ii throw it out at right angles to the touchline** or **iii walk out with it at right angles to the touchline any distance not less than five or more than 15 yards and there put it down first declaring how far he intends to walk out.**

33 . If two or more players holding the ball are pushed into touch the ball shall belong in touch to the player who first had hold of it when in the field of play and has not yet released his hold of it.

34. If the ball when thrown out of touch be not thrown out at right angles to the touchline the captain of either side may at once claim to have it thrown out again.

35. A catch made when the ball is thrown out of touch is not a fair catch.

36. Kick-off is a place kick from the centre of the field of play and cannot count as a goal. The opposite side must stand at least 10 yards in front of the ball until it has been kicked.

37. The ball shall be kicked off **i at the commencement of the game ii after a goal has been obtained.**

38. The sides shall change goals as often as and whenever a goal is obtained unless it has been otherwise agreed by the captains before the commencement of the match.

39. The captains of the respective sides shall toss up before the commencement of the match, the winner of the toss shall have the option of goals or the kick-off .

40. Whenever a Goal shall have been obtained the side that has lost the goal shall then kick-off.

41. Kick out is a drop kick by one of the players of the side which has had to touch the ball down in their own goal or into whose touch in-goal the ball has gone (Rule 21) and is the mode of bringing the ball again into play, and cannot count as a goal.

42. Kick out must be a drop kick and from not more than 25 yards outside the kickers goal line. If the ball when kicked out pitch in touch it must be taken back and kicked out again. The kicker's side must be behind the ball when kicked out.

43. A player who has made and claimed a fair catch shall thereupon either take a drop kick or a punt or place the ball for a place kick.

44. After a fair catch has been made the opposite side may come up to the catcher's mark and (except in cases under rule 50) the catcher's side retiring the ball shall be kicked from such mark or from a spot any distance in a direct line (not being in touch) behind it.

45. A player may touch the ball down in his own goal at any time.

46. A side having touched the ball down in their opponents' goal, shall try at goal either by a place kick or a punt out.

47. If a try at goal be made by a place kick a player of the side who has touched the ball down shall bring it up to the goal line subject to rule 48 in a straight line from and opposite to the spot where the ball was touched down and there make a mark on the goal line and then walk straight out with it at right angles to the goal line such distance as he thinks proper and there place it for another of his side to kick. The kicker's side must be behind the ball when it is kicked, and the opposite side must remain behind their goal line until the ball has been placed on the ground (see Rules 54 and 55).

48. If the ball has been touched down between the goalposts, it may be brought out in a straight line from either of such posts but if brought out from between them the opposite may charge at once (see rule 54)]

49. If the try at goal be by a punt out (see Rule 29) a player of the side which has touched the ball down shall bring it straight up to the goal line opposite to the spot where it was touched down and there make a

mark on the goal line and then punt out from any spot behind the goal line not nearer to the goalpost than such mark, or from touch in-goal if necessary, beyond which mark it is not lawful for the opposite side who must keep behind their goal line to pass until ball has been kicked (see Rules 54 and 55)

50. If a fair catch be made from a punt out or a punt on the catcher may either proceed as provided by Rules 43 and 44 or himself take a punt on in which case the mark made on making a fair catch shall be regarded (for the purpose of determining as well the position of the player who makes the punt on as of the other players of both sides) as the mark made on the goal line in the case of a punt out

51. A catch made in touch from a punt out or a punt on is not a fair catch: the ball must then be taken or thrown out of touch as provided by Rule 32 but if the catch be made in touch in-goal the ball is at once dead and must be kicked out as provided by rule 21

52. When the ball has been touched down in the opponents' goal none of the side in whose goal it has been so touched down shall touch it or in any way displace it or interfere with the player of the other side who may be taking it up or out

53. The ball is dead whenever a goal has been obtained, but if a try at goal be not successful the kick shall be considered as only an ordinary kick in the course of the game

54. Charging i.e. rushing forward to kick the ball or tackle a player, is lawful for the opposite side in all cases of a place kick after a fair catch or upon a try at goal immediately the Ball touches or is placed on the ground; and in cases of a drop kick or punt after a fair catch as soon as the player having the ball commences to run or offers to kick or the ball has touched the ground but he may always draw back and unless he has dropped the ball or actually touched it with his foot they must again retire to his mark (see rule 56). The opposite side in the case of a punt out or a punt on, and the kicker's side in all cases may not charge until the ball has been kicked

55. If a player having the ball when about to punt it out goes out side the goal line or when about to punt on advances nearer to his own goal line than his mark made on making the fair catch, or if after the ball has been touched down in the opponents' goal or a fair catch has been made more than one player on the side which has so touched it down or made the fair catch, touch the ball before it is again kicked the opposite side may charge at once

56. In cases of a fair catch the opposite side may come up to and stand anywhere on or behind a line drawn through the mark made by the player who has made the catch and parallel to their own goal line; but in the case of a fair catch from a punt out or a punt on they may not advance further in the direction of the touch-line nearest to such mark than a line drawn through such mark to their goal line and parallel to such touch-line. In all cases (except a punt out and a punt on) the kicker's side must be behind the ball when it is kicked but may not charge until it has been kicked

57. No hacking or hacking over or tripping up shall be allowed under any circumstances

58. No one wearing projecting nails iron plates or gutta percha on any part of his boots or shoes shall be allowed to play in a match

59. The captains of the respective sides shall be the sole arbiters of all disputes

Approved 22/6/71

Page updated 18 March 2008 by [Peter Shortell](#)