

UNDER 12s RULES OF PLAY

Players and match officials must ensure that the following Rules of Play and RFU Regulation 15 <https://www.englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulat...> are observed when playing rugby at Under 12.

These Under 12s Rules of Play set out below are part of the Playing Pathway that aim to equip players with the skills they need to safely enjoy rugby union. The Age Grade Rules of Play detail the level to which children of each can play to, coaches and match officials are encouraged to discuss necessary or desired pre-game and in-game modifications that reduce the playing level with the view to provide more appropriate learning opportunities.

Any terms defined in these Rules shall have the meanings set out in the World Rugby Laws of the Game.

The key elements of the Under 12s Rules of Play are:

- Team numbers: A maximum of 12 a-side
- Maximum pitch size: 60 metres x 43 metres
- Ball Size: 4
- Maximum minutes each half: 20
- Continuation of the contested strike
- Nearest 5 players in a scrum (all players trained, late specialisation)
- No limit on numbers contesting for the ball including in the maul and ruck
- Introduction of the hand off below the armpits

1. General:

- **a)** The object of the game is to score a try by grounding the ball on or behind the opponents' goal line. A penalty try will be awarded if a try would probably have been scored but for an infringement by the defending team.
- **b)** Only infringements that affect the oppositions' play should be sanctioned. If there is no effect, advantage should be played wherever it is safe to do so.

2. Teams:

- **a)** Under 12 Rugby is played between teams of equal numbers of players, containing a maximum of twelve players from each team on the pitch at any one time.
- **b)** At a scrum, 5 players on each team will form the scrum with the remaining players forming the back line.
- **c)** Rolling substitutions are permitted and substituted players can return at any time. Substitutions can only take place when the ball is dead and always with the referee's permission.
- **d)** Coaches are not permitted on the pitch when the game is in play and the referee is encouraged to advise and guide the teams and players.

3. Pitch Size:

- **a)** The maximum pitch size is 60 metres by 43 metres, plus 5 metres for each in-goal area, representing half a full size pitch
- **b)** The referee and coaches may agree to reduce the pitch sizes provided that they agree it is safe to do so.
- **c)** Adjacent pitches should be no closer than 5 metres.
- **d)** Provision should be made to indicate the position of the place 15 metres out each goal line, serving a similar purpose to the 22 metre line in the World Rugby Laws of the Game.

4. Starts and Restarts:

- **a)** A drop kick from the centre of the half way line will be used to start each half of the match and for all restarts after a score. After a score, the opponents of the team who scored will have the option to receive the kick or kick off themselves.
- **b)** The kicker's team must be behind the ball until it has been kicked and the non- kicking team must be at least 7 metres back from the half way line.
- **c)** If the ball does not travel 7 metres but is first played by an opponent, play continues.
- **d)** If the ball does not travel 7 metres or is played by the kicking team before reaching 7 metres or is kicked directly into touch, the non-kicking team will have the choice of
 - **i.** A throw in to a scrum at the centre of the half way line.
 - **ii.** The kick to be re-taken.
- **e)** Where players of the kicking team are in front of the ball , the non-kicking team shall have a throw in to a scrum at the centre of the half way line.
- **f)** If the ball is kicked into the opponents' in-goal, without having touched or been touched by a player and is then immediately touched down or made dead, or the ball goes into touch in goal, the non-kicking team has the choice of:
 - **i.** A throw in to a scrum at the centre of the half way line.
 - **ii.** The kick to be re-taken.

5. Free Kick:

- **a)** After the following infringements, a free kick will be awarded to the non- offending team:
 - **i.** Foul Play.
 - **ii.** Offside.
 - **iii.** Squeezeball in the event that a ball carrier uses the squeezeball technique.
 - *Note: Squeezeball" is a technique where the ball carrier goes to ground, head forward (touching or close to the ground), irrespective of immediate contact with opponents, usually keeping parallel to the touchline, holding and protecting the ball close to the chest and, when on the ground, pushing the ball back between the legs.*

- **iv.** If a player falls on or over a player lying on the ground with the ball in their possession or voluntarily fall on or over players lying on the ground with the ball between them, or near them.
- **v.** If a team pushes in the scrum.
- **vii.** When the tackler makes contact above the base of the sternum.
- **b)** A free kick is a kick from hand. The kick must move the ball a visible distance from hand or along the ground. This can either be a tap by the player to themselves, or a kick to gain ground. The opponents must be 7 metres back, towards their own goal line.

6. Passing:

The ball may only be passed sideways or backwards. If the ball is handed to another player who is in front of the ball carrier, or passed or knocked forwards towards the opponents' dead ball line, a scrum is awarded to the non-offending team. Referees should play advantage wherever it is safe to do so.

7. Free Passes:

- **a)** A free pass is awarded when the ball or ball carrier has gone into touch, 5 metres in from the touchline where the ball or ball carrier went into touch.
- **b)** At a free pass, the opposition must be 7 metres back from the mark. At a free pass, the passer must start with the ball in both hands and, when the referee calls "Play", pass the ball backwards through the air to a member of their team. For safety reasons, no player from either team may run until the pass is made.

8. The Tackle, Maul and Ruck:

- **a)** Only the ball carrier can be tackled. The ball carrier can run and dodge potential tacklers and is permitted to fend them off using their hand below the armpits of the opponent.
- **b)** The tackler must grip and hold the ball carrier below the base of the sternum (the area of the tummy or bellow and below). The ball carrier must not go into contact with an opponent with their shoulders below their hips, or dip down late and low or otherwise place their head into the head space of the opponent.
- **c)** Support players must not stand either side and in close proximity to the ball carrier to prevent defenders from making the next tackle.
- **d)** When the ball carrier is held in contact and remains on their feet they may continue to progress forward. Once forward momentum has been stopped, the ball must be played away from the contact area.
- **e)** When the ball carrier is not taken to ground, the opponent may contest the ball by grabbing it.
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- **f)** A “Tackle” occurs when the ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and is brought to ground. A ball carrier who is not held is not a tackled player and a tackle has not taken place. Opposition players who hold the ball carrier and bring that player to ground, and who also go to ground, are known as tacklers. Opposition players who hold the ball carrier and do not go to ground are not tacklers. The tackle must include the use of arms. Where the ball carrier is taken to ground, the referee will call “Tackle-Release”.
- **g)** When the ball carrier is taken to ground, the tackler must immediately release the ball carrier and must get to their feet as soon as possible before they are permitted to contest the ball or block the pass.
- **h)** When the ball carrier is taken to ground and the referee calls “Tackle-Release”, the ball carrier must pass the ball immediately, roll away or place the ball towards their own team.
- **i)** When the tackle is made the team in possession of the ball may only support from behind.
- **j)** When the tackle is made and the ball carrier is on the ground, supporting players may:
 - **i.** pick up or rip the ball and run or pass away from the contact area; or
 - **ii.** if a ruck is not formed, pick up the ball and run; or
 - **iii.** join to form a ruck but must do so from their own side (i.e. from the direction of their own goal line) and drive over the ball, in an attempt to take their immediate opponents away from the ball.
- **k)** If j) iii. above has taken place, the next arriving player can pass the ball to another player or run with it
- **l)** A “ruck” is a phase of play where one or more players from each team, who are on their feet, in physical contact, close around the ball on the ground. Open play has ended. Players are rucking when they are in a ruck and using their feet to try to win or keep possession of the ball, without being guilty of foul play.
- **m)** When the ball has been clearly won by a team at a ruck and the ball is available to be played the referee will call “Use it” after which the ball must be played within 5 seconds. If the ball is not played within 5 seconds the referee will award a scrum and the team not in possession of the ball at the ruck is awarded the throw- in.
- **n)** A “maul” begins when a player carrying the ball is held by one or more opponents and one of the ball carrier’s team mates bind on the ball carrier. A maul therefore consists, when it begins, of at least three players, all on their feet; the ball carrier and one player from each team. All the players involved must be bound to the maul and must be on their feet and moving towards a goal line. Open play has ended.
- **o)** When a maul is formed the ball must be made available within 5 seconds. The referee should call “Use it” and the ball should be moved away from the contact area. If neither team can pass the ball away, a scrum should be awarded to the team not in possession when the maul began.
- **p)** When the tackle is made the team in possession of the ball may only support from behind.
- **q)** When the tackle is made and the ball carrier is on the ground, supporting players may:

- i. pick up or rip the ball and run or pass away from the contact area; or
- ii. if a ruck is not formed, pick up the ball and run; or
- iii. join to form a ruck but must do so from their own side (i.e. from the direction of their own goal line) and drive over the ball, in an attempt to take their immediate opponents away from the ball.
- **r)** If q) iii. above has taken place, the next arriving player can pass the ball to another player or run with it.
- **s)** When the ball has been clearly won by a team at a ruck and the ball is available to be played the referee will call “Use it” after which the ball must be played within 5 seconds. If the ball is not played within 5 seconds the referee will award a scrum and the team not in possession of the ball at the ruck is awarded the throw-in.
- **t)** Support players must not stand either side and in close proximity to the ball carrier to prevent defenders from making the next tackle.

9. Kicking:

- **a)** Kicking the ball when it is on the ground is prohibited (known as a “fly-hack”).
- **b)** If the ball is kicked from outside of the 22 metre line directly into touch, a free pass is awarded to the opposing team who last touched the ball in line with where the ball was kicked and 5 metres in from the touchline unless they elect to take a quick throw in in compliance with 9(d).
- **c)** Box kicks and drop goals are not permitted.
- **d)** Where the kick goes into touch the non-kicking team has the option to take a quick throw in preference to the free pass unless it has been touched by anyone other than a player. It must be the same ball that was kicked into touch. For a quick throw-in, the player may be anywhere outside the field of play between the line of touch and the player’s goal line. If the ball is brought back into the field of play, or players from the kicking team are in close proximity before the throw can be taken the referee should award a free-kick in accordance with the rules above.

10. Actions Inside the 22 Metre Line (the “22”):

- **a)** If the ball is kicked from within the 22 by the defending team and goes directly into touch, a free pass will be awarded to the non-kicking team 5 metres in from where the ball crossed the touchline unless it has been passed back into the “22” and there has been no subsequent tackle, ruck, maul or the ball had touched an opposition player, in which case a restart will be from where the ball was kicked. Alternatively, the opposing team may elect to take a quick throw-in in compliance with 9(d).
- **b)** A drop out “22” will be awarded:
 - i. when the ball is kicked into in-goal by the attacking team and grounded by a defender; or
 - ii. when the ball is kicked, sent or carried into in-goal by the attacking team and the ball touches or crosses the in-goal touchline or dead ball line.

11. Ball to Ground:

- **a)** Players must play rugby on their feet, with the ball in hand.
- **b)** If the ball goes to ground, players should be encouraged to pick it up. If they dive to recover the ball they must either get up with the ball, pass the ball or release it immediately and be allowed to do so by the opposition.
- **c)** If the ball is lost forward, a scrum is awarded to the non-offending team unless advantage occurs to the non-offending team.
- **d)** If the ball is passed other than forward and goes to ground, play will continue and either team may pick up the ball. If the ball rolls into touch a free pass will be awarded 5 metres from the touchline level with where it crossed the touchline to the non-offending team.

12. Scrums:

- **a)** A scrum will be awarded for:
 - **i.** a forward pass; or
 - **ii.** a knock on; or
 - **iii.** where the ball does not emerge from a maul or ruck; or
 - **iv.** where the ball becomes unplayable.
- **b)** The scrum will consist of 5 players from each team, i.e. a prop on either side of the hooker forming the front row plus two locks forming the second row. They will be the nearest 5 players from either side, with a sixth acting as scrum half. All players should be encouraged to take part.
- **c)** The referee will call “Crouch” and then “Bind”. The front rows crouch and using their outside arm each prop must bind onto the back or side of their opponent and the second rows crouch and bind onto each other using their inside arm with the outside arm around the hips of the prop in front of them. Neither of the locks may unbind to pick up the ball and must remain bound to the scrum.
- **d)** Following a pause, the referee will call “Set” only when the front rows are ready. The front rows may then engage.
- **e)** Front rows must not charge at each other. If they start to set too close together and with their necks and backs bent, the scrum must be stopped and the scrum reformed. Props’ body positions must be parallel to the touchline, their head and shoulders must be no lower than the hips and there must be no downward pressure exerted.
- *Note to referee: Referees and coaches MUST be aware of the following: If the scrum collapses, the whistle must immediately be blown and the appropriate sanction awarded or the scrum reset. If a player is persistently involved in collapsing or illegal binding, they must not take any further part in the scrum or if a player’s lack of technique or strength is a danger then they must be replaced. All players, including replacements, should be suitably trained and experienced. f) Only the hookers may strike for the ball. Neither team may push.*
- **g)** The scrum half must pass the ball from the base of the scrum. They cannot run with the ball.

- **h)** The back line of both teams must remain 5 metres behind the scrum until the ball emerges or the opposing scrum half lifts the ball from the ground.
- **i)** The scrum half not throwing the ball into the scrum may start directly alongside their opponent, however, they must not move beyond the middle line of the scrum until the ball has emerged from the scrum or an opposing scrum half lifts the ball from the ground.
- **j)** If a scrum is awarded within 5 metres of the goal line, the scrum is to be taken at a mark such that the middle line of the scrum is 5 metres from the goal line. In this case the backs of the defending team must stay on or behind the goal line until the scrum is completed.
- *Note: Referees should pay particular attention to ensure that the scrum half throwing the ball into the scrum is not “feeding” their own players: the scrum half must hold the ball with both hands, with its major axis parallel to the ground/the touchline, midway between their knees and ankles. The scrum half must release the ball from outside the tunnel so that it lands midway between the two front rows and beyond the width of the nearer props’ shoulders.*

13. Offside:

- **a)** In general play, anyone who is in front of a team mate who has played the ball is liable to sanction unless they return to an onside position (i.e. behind the team mate who played the ball).
- **b)** At the tackle, there are two offside lines at the hindmost part of the tackled player and tackler. All other players from the defending team must retire towards their own dead ball line until they are behind the hindmost part of the tackled player and tackler.
- **c)** At the maul, the offside lines are at the hindmost point of any player in the maul.
- **d)** At the ruck, the offside lines are at the hindmost point of any player in the ruck.
- **e)** At the scrum, a player is offside if they are less than 5 metres from the scrum before the ball is out of the scrum, unless the player is the scrum half or participating in the scrum.
- **f)** When kicking, a player is offside if they are in front of the ball when it is kicked or within 7 metres of an opponent waiting to play the ball (or the place where the ball will land).

14. Infringements:

- **a)** The ball carrier may run and dodge potential tacklers but must not fend or hand them off above the armpits.
- **b)** The tackler must not make contact with the ball carrier above the base of the sternum.
- **c)** No player shall use the technique known or referred to as “Squeezeball”. No person involved in the teaching or coaching of rugby may teach or coach to encourage the use of the “Squeezeball” technique.
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- **d)** No player shall fall on or over a player lying on the ground with the ball in their possession or fall on or over players lying on the ground with the ball between them, or near them.
- *A player is assumed to have fallen voluntarily unless the referee is absolutely certain the fall was accidental.*
- *In the very rare instances when the fall is accidental, play must be stopped and a scrum awarded to the team previously in possession. The object is to keep players on their feet and to prevent them from falling to the ground, thus removing a dangerous area of play. This will create proper rucks and mauls through encouraging players from each team to remain on their feet.*
- **e)** Contact with players not in possession.
- **f)** Foul play.
- **g)** Pushing at the scrum.
- *Note to referee: No advantage shall be played.*