

REFEREEING SEVENS



USARUGBY HANDBOOK 2011





FOREWORD

A great deal has happened since the initial release of the *Refereeing Sevens Handbook*.

October 2009 heralded the return of rugby (this time seven-a-side) to the Olympic Games in 2016 and 2020. In January 2011 the International Rugby Board developed its “Officiating Sevens Rugby Course” and published the *Practical Guide to Officiating Seven-a-Side Rugby*.

USARugby is releasing this updated version of the Handbook in recognition of the arrival of Sevens rugby onto the world stage and to keep pace with the continuing evolution of the game. However, one fact does remain constant—handbooks and the written word can only do so much. The true way forward is a steady diet of increasingly competitive Sevens matches, followed by qualified hands-on coaching.

Patrick McNally

National Sevens Referee Program Manager

2011



Dave Stephenson/Numina Photo

Courtesy of USA Sevens LLC

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HISTORY OF SEVEN-A-SIDE RUGBY

By Chris Thau on IRB.com
April 10, 2008

Seven-a-side rugby is 125 years old this season. It was born in 1883 – 10 years after the formation of the Scottish Football Union – in Melrose, a prosperous little town in the South of Scotland, an area known as the Scottish Borders.

The Melrose club had a fine rugby side in which the star players were the local butcher David Sanderson and his apprentice Ned Haig. However, the new club was experiencing serious financial difficulties and the committee, in an attempt to raise the much-needed finance, decided to organize an athletic meeting, or a Sports Day, at the end of the 1883 season.

“Want of money made us rack our brains as to what was to be done to keep the club from going to the wall, and the idea struck me that a football tournament might prove attractive,” recalled Haig.

The committee felt that given the numbers involved the proposal was unworkable. According to the Melrose club historian Les Allan, Sanderson reminded his apprentice and teammate of having played in some sort of reduced numbers tournament while working on the English side of the border.

The solution became obvious, to cut down the size of the team from 15 to seven players (three forwards, two half backs and two backs) and the playing time to 15 minutes in total (two halves of seven minutes each and one minute half-time break). The Melrose committee agreed unanimously to hold a Sevens tournament, unaware of the historic significance of their decision.

Seven Border clubs – Gala, Selkirk, St. Cuthbert’s Hawick, Earlston, Melrose, Gala Forest and St. Ronan’s Innerleithen

–entered the first tournament held on 28 April 1883 at the now famous Greenyards ground with the picturesque Eldon Hills in the background. The Sports Day programme of events included foot races, dribbling race, drop goal and place kicking competitions. However, the main attraction was the Sevens tournament.

The Border Advertiser of 2 May 1883 wrote: “The competition has been looked forward to with great interest, as most clubs of the district were expected to compete for the prize – a silver cup presented by the Ladies of Melrose.”

Sudden death in first final

Not surprisingly the leading clubs in the district – Gala and Melrose – reached the final. The match between the two fierce rivals, which ended in a draw after 15 minutes of play, had an unexpected outcome that originated the sudden-death feature of the modern Sevens game.

“After playing the statutory 15 minutes they decided to play extra-time. Sanderson scored a cheeky blind-side try and, being captain, led his team from the field and claimed the Ladies Cup. Gala protested, but in vain,” explained Melrose Sevens historian Les Allan.

The Melrose players, who had broken away from the Gala club some six years previously, turned a deaf ear to the protestations of their opponents. The sudden-death rule stood the test of time to become a feature of today’s Sevens game when the teams are level at the end of a match.

Sanderson, who for an unknown reason had a major disagreement with the Melrose Committee, walked home with

the Ladies Cup, which re-emerged in the Melrose Club museum, donated by a relative, after more than a century. From 1884 onwards, the tournament trophy was the second Ladies Cup, which has now joined the original one in the Melrose club collection.

Sevens popularity grows

Sevens spread quickly in the Scottish Borders with Selkirk, Gala, Hawick, Jedforest, Langholm, Kelso and Earlston following in the footsteps of Melrose and launching their own club tournaments. Since the 1885 Cup, Sevens rugby has become a major feature both at the beginning and the end of the season in the Scottish Borders.

It is said that Nelson, the cradle of the New Zealand game, were the first to hold a School Sevens tournament outside Scotland around the turn of the century, but the documentary evidence is scant. Instead, there is plenty of evidence that 1921 was the year Sevens rugby took off internationally with the North Shields Sevens at Percy Park in England and the Buenos Aires Sevens sharing the distinction of being pioneers of the international short game.

The Middlesex Sevens, launched by Dr. Cargill, a Scottish member of the County Committee in 1926, became an attractive end-of-season event in England, but the biggest seven-a-side tournament in the world remains Rosslyn Park Sevens, launched in 1939 by the late Charles Burton, the founder of the Public School Wanderers, which gathers every year more than 300 school teams and over 3,500 schoolchildren from all over the world.

Nowadays there is hardly a rugby territory in the world without its own Sevens tournament and for a nearly a century Sevens rugby remained a wonderful pastime, played by clubs and teams to wind up a long and demanding season or as a gentle build-up to the new one.

This went on until 1973, when the Scottish Rugby Union decided to celebrate its centenary in style with an international seven-a-side tournament, the first in history. The SRU Centenary Sevens gave a glimpse of the huge potential of the short game. Somewhat prophetically, it was England who prevailed in the end to beat an exciting Irish team in the final at Murrayfield, having overcome in the process strong opposition from a star-studded Welsh side, the Scots, New Zealand, Australia, France and the Barbarians.

Hong Kong seed sown

Legend has it that among the keen Murrayfield crowd in May 1973, there were a couple of expatriates, one Ian Gow, an executive with Rothman's Tobacco Company in Hong Kong, and 'Tokkie' Smith, the then Chairman of the Hong Kong RFU, who were impressed by the novelty and the thrill of the short game in its maiden international competition.

Between the two the idea of a regular Sevens tournament took shape and by the end of 1975, with Jock Campbell, the then Promotions Manager of the Cathay Pacific Airline joining the team, the first Hong Kong Sevens tournament was on the drawing board.

The Hong Kong International Sevens started the following year in 1976, and after several lean years – when it battled to make ends meet – it finally became the star of international Sevens in the mid 1980s. The tournament went from strength to strength and its public and commercial success, congenial atmosphere and outstanding rugby, did wonders to promote the idea of a world tournament, which materialized some 10 years later in 1987.

First RWC Sevens

Twenty years after the SRU Centenary Sevens tournament and following the successful completion of two Rugby

World Cups in 1987 and 1991, the game of Sevens was ready to take the international plunge. The International Rugby Board accepted the SRU proposal to hold a RWC Sevens Tournament in 1993 with the offer of the Melrose Cup, a trophy modelled on the original Ladies Cup of Melrose, as the top prize.

The RWC Sevens, as it approaches its fifth edition in Dubai next March, has gone from strength to strength and Sevens is now a core game at many multi-sport international competitions including the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games. The launch of the IRB Sevens World Series at the end of 1999 has provided the framework for the growth of Sevens from a village pastime into a worldwide Grand Prix circuit, followed by large crowds and afforded unparalleled television coverage. During the last decade, Rugby Sevens, a village game born in Melrose 125 years ago, has taken the world by storm.



The First Melrose Sevens Winners - 1883
Standing: J. Tacket, A. Haig, J. Simpson, J. Riddell
Sitting: T. Riddell, G. Mercer
In Front: D. Sanderson

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Ned Haig

“Television broadcast coverage of the eight-tournament 2009/2010 World Series reached 141 countries across six continents with 34 broadcasters showing action from the most competitive Series to date, won by Samoa for the first time in the Series’ 11-year history ...

... Programming from the Sevens was carried in 16 languages and reached 325 million homes, with an estimated potential reach in excess of 750 million.”

—International Rugby Board



OBJECTIVES

5 Objectives of the **USARUGBY** Sevens Refereeing Program

1. Standardize and institute IRB-approved Sevens refereeing practices throughout the United States.
2. Identify, train and manage Referees based on Sevens rugby and target those individuals with potential for future development.
3. Contact and work with the Sevens coaching community.
4. Observe as many Sevens Tournaments and Territorial Championships as reasonably possible, and effectively manage the National Sevens Championship Tournaments.
5. Work with the Men's and Women's National Sevens Team programs.

PRINCIPLES OF THE GAME

Spirit– *“Rugby owes much of its appeal to the fact that it is played both to the letter and within the spirit of the laws. The responsibility for ensuring that this happens lies not with one individual – it involves coaches, captains, players and referees.”*

—From IRB Playing Charter



Contest and Continuity– *“... as one team attempts to maintain continuity of possession, the opposing team strives to contest for possession. This provides the essential balance between continuity of play and continuity of possession. This balance of contestability and continuity applies to both set piece and general play.”*

—From IRB Playing Charter



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**WE MUST ENSURE
A FAIR CONTEST
FOR THE BALL**

SEVENS VS FIFTEENS



Courtesy of USA Sevens LLC

A. Differences in **MIND SET**:

- Possession is paramount.
- Tournament play as opposed to a single match.
- Certain teams choose to avoid contact.
- There are more quick penalty taps.
- When the ball goes into touch, it is likely there will be more quick throw ins.

B. Differences in **ADAPTATIONS OF THE LAW**:

- Seven players.
- Times:
 - Two seven-minute halves with a one-minute halftime.
 - Ten-minute halves for finals.
 - Two minutes: sin bin.
 - Forty seconds: conversions kicks.
 - Thirty seconds: penalty kicks.
- Conversions and penalty kicks are drop kicks only.
- Kick-offs/restarts are made by team that scored.
 - Every infraction is a free kick.
- Scrums consist of three players on each side.
- Three substitutes allowed, but five can be nominated.
- In-goal judges were introduced in 1996 to speed up the game.

C. Differences in **ATHLETES**:

- Speed. Speed. Speed. No room for wide bodies.
- Every Sevens player is essentially playing the same position.

D. Differences in **SKILL SETS**:

- Mobility.
- More one-on-one tackling.
- A real contest for the ball at restarts, like set pieces.
- Drop kicks.

I regard Sevens as an integral part of the development program for players. I would like to use Sevens for specific players in enhancing not just skills and game awareness but also giving them experience of big match conditions which Sevens offers.

—**Ian McGeechan**, 2009 British and Irish Lions coach

REFEREEING SEVEN-A-SIDE RUGBY

Speed, Pace and Quickness



Hong Kong Sevens

Use all of your experience and ability to allow the players to play the game of Sevens at speed, with pace and as quickly as their skills allow. Do not allow the players' actions—or yours—to slow down the game.

The Referee can feel—and indeed is—especially exposed on the rugby pitch in a game of Sevens. Given that fact and the nature of the shorter and faster game, it is imperative that the Referee be sharp and accurate—sharp mentally and physically, as well as accurate in decision-making. The Referee must get it right, and must get it right the first time.

One decision can and will affect the outcome of a Sevens game.
—**Steve Landers**, retired International Referee

Sevens Referees need to be calm, especially if situations get heated, and accurately adjudicate any form of explosion. The tension of the concentrated period (and the more obvious one-on-one confrontation) combines with the heightened emotions found in a tournament—where the winner stands to gain more and the team on the brink of being eliminated may play with more reckless abandon.



Hong Kong Sevens

The IRB Sevens circuit has proven to be a breeding ground for match official talent over the past decade with many of the world's top Referees having graduated through the Series. It is the perfect platform for a referee to develop, providing exposure to a high-intensity, high-paced environment that tests both physical and mental skills.

—**Paddy O'Brien**, IRB Referee Manager

TACKLE

The first priority for the Sevens referee is to get the tackler away from the ball carrier.

A tackle occurs when the ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and is brought to ground.

— Law 15, IRB Laws of the Game 

Arrival. Getting to the breakdown as soon as possible is vital. Strive to be the third person to the breakdown. The quicker and better positioned you are at the tackle, the more effective you are as a Referee.

Availability. The ball should be made available immediately. If ball carriers do what they should, the ball should emerge. If it does not come out quickly, then something is wrong.

THE TACKLER MUST CLEARLY RELEASE THE BALL CARRIER. Upon hitting the ground in the tackle, tacklers must immediately release the ball and the ball carrier before getting to their feet and playing the ball. Assist tacklers, who help execute a tackle by bringing the ball carrier to ground but stay on their feet, must immediately release the ball and the ball carrier, and must also become gate-compliant.

The Purpose: Give the ball carriers more time to “play the ball,” thus providing greater continuity, and also allow for arriving players to legally contest possession and to clear players within the tackle zone while remaining on their feet.

Defending: Defenders delay their release of the ball to allow more time for the defense to get in position and to slow down the speed of attack.

Do not let the tackler slow down delivery of the ball.

Attacking: Ball carriers get isolated and stall until support arrives. When ball carriers go to ground, they give away any rights to play the ball and must release the ball to arriving players on their feet.

Attacking team may want to set up a ruck to create an off-side line and force the defending team to move back.



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WATCH FOR:

Through The Gate. Be vigilant for players entering the tackle zone from the side. Do not let the defense run back through the tackle zone as it impedes or slows down play.

On Their Feet. Insist that arriving players stay on their feet.

Communication. Always use clear verbal communication to identify whether each breakdown is a tackle or a ruck.

Off-side Lines. Be careful not to create phantom off-side lines. When there is no ruck, there is no off-side.

Direction Of Play. If there is a tackle, but no ruck or maul, players are free to move in any direction on the pitch (i.e., fill in opponents passing lanes, move behind the ball) outside of the tackle zone.

Late and Dangerous Tackles. They are more likely to occur with the sudden changes of direction and more open field tackling typical in Sevens rugby. A game may flare up under these circumstances.

Isolated Tackled Players Holding on to the Ball. A ball carrier isolated from teammates and not releasing after tackle must be penalized. From a long body ruck, or *squeezeball*, the ball must come out **immediately**.

Third Player Diving On Top. As a tackler rolls away, a third player dives over the player. It may look *accidental*, but this slows down the release of the ball and it must be penalized. Players must stay on their feet.

Turning Of A Tackled Player. Tacklers must make an effort to release tackled players and/or the ball. Tackled players must be able to lay the ball down on the ground behind them and back towards their own team.

No Tackle. Has there even been a tackle?



Dropkickphotos.com

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QUICK DECISION. As a Sevens Referee you must approach the breakdown as soon as possible and locate the ball quickly. Analyze and resolve the situation immediately by either letting play continue, penalizing any offenders promptly or declaring the ball unplayable. You cannot spend more than two-to-three seconds on these decisions, which are the only options.

Prevention and reading of the advantage options are essential and often resolve the breakdown situation immediately. You should not allow long disputes over the ball at the breakdown as they nearly always end in penalty kicks.

THE CONTACT AREA

by Dana Teagarden
IRB Women's Referee Panel Member



Bruce Southwick – Photo by Zoomtiji

Sevens Rugby Referees must have exceptional dynamic decision making skills, a sound and accurate understanding of how the Law is intended to ensure safe and equitable continuity of contest, and practical understanding and empathy for how the Game is played. The most critical area is the contact area—tackle and post-tackle.

Try-scoring Opportunities and the Dynamic Game

Though some might contend that fewer numbers make the contact area easier to referee in Sevens, the pace of the game and the effect that any one decision can have on the match outcome means that the Sevens Referee has no room for error. Recent IRB stats show that approximately 30% of tries come from penalties and 20% come from turnovers. There is no hiding from the fact that Referee decisions, especially in the contact area, have a significant impact on match outcome in Sevens.

The Sevens Referee's role isn't to accurately identify and penalize every technical infraction of the Law but to accurately identify infractions and then exercise contextual judgment about how best to deal with those infractions to ensure fair contest while still preserving the dynamic nature of the game.

The Litmus Test: Has a player done something positive and productive that makes the ball safely and equitably available immediately so that contest can continue? Or has the player been negative or passive in contact, thereby slowing the availability of the ball to players in a legal position on their feet?

Rugby "Common Sense"

Review and understand the definitions as well as the intentions of the Law. All rugby laws promulgate from the fundamental tenants of Safety and Equity. Build your picture and expectations of the Game understanding how a particular law intends to further either Safety and/or Equity and couple that with understanding the bands of acceptability for a particular tournament or competition and you'll be best equipped to employ rugby common sense.

Linear Theory vs Accurate Reality – It's Not a Lottery

The classic decision making model for teaching referees how to referee the contact area tackle and post-tackle contest is a linear checklist that looks something like this:

1. Tackler (releases, moves away without impeding)
2. Ball Carrier (plays, passes, or places the ball)
3. Other players (on their feet, through the gate)

Tackle (continued)

The accurate reality is more like an elaborate game of rock/paper/scissors where at any moment, based on compliance with safe and equitable play, any one player's "rights" to the ball may supersede the "rights" of a player who only an instant before had "more" rights to the ball. And sometimes players have equal rights and it is a 50-50 contest that the Referee has no active part in, at that moment.

This is not an excuse for a Referee to have a confusing or confused decision-making process. The contact area should not be or appear to be a lottery.

Priority one

After safety, the first priority for the Sevens Referee at the contact area is to ensure the ball is available immediately to players on their feet in a legal position.

Not a tackle?

Be very clear in your mind and in your verbalization if a contact situation is not a tackle (ie player on the ground not held or going down for a ball). Arriving players in this situation may play from all angles (ie no "gate") and do not have to allow the player on the ground to get up. They cannot dive on the player on the ground. Players on their feet have greater rights to the ball than a player on the ground. A player on the ground must exercise their options immediately and must not deny access to the ball to a player on their feet.

Tackled but...?

Because we place so much emphasis on the tackler releasing to ensure ball availability, it is patently unfair to disadvantage a skillful and athletic tackler who quickly releases and gets to their feet by deciding "not held" and allowing the ball carrier to get up with the ball. Be accurate and balanced in this situation as it is not uncommon in Sevens.

Tackle Assist

The "Tackle Assist" player, either the one-on-one opponent who keeps their feet or the second player attacking the ball mid-tackle, must clearly release both the ball and the ball carrier, get their hands and body out of the tackle zone without unfairly impinging on the tackled ball carrier's rights and re-enter the tackle zone legally to compete for the ball.

In Summary

Be consciously competent at every contact situation. Have a sound, logical, and efficient process. Execute a movement pattern that is unobtrusive to play but that still allows you to be in a credible position to make decisions. Know that "not acting" should also be a conscious decision. Deal with the clear and obvious infringements. Understand the bands of acceptability for the tournament or competition. Observe the 50-50 contests but don't get pulled into becoming the deciding factor. Keep verbal exchanges to a minimum – if you have to talk about it in the contact area in Sevens then the negative effect has already occurred. Reward positive and productive play. Recognize who benefits from slow ball and deal quickly and decisively with deliberate infringements and negative play. *D.T.*

RUCK/MAUL

As a Referee, you need to clearly understand what constitutes a ruck.

A ruck occurs when . . . *“one or more players from each team, who are on their feet and in physical contact, close around the ball on the ground. Open play has ended.”*

—From **Law 16, IRB Laws of the Game**



A maul occurs when a ball carrier . . . *“is held by one or more opponents, and one or more of the ball carrier’s team mates bind on the ball carrier.”*

—From **Law 17, IRB Laws of the Game**



Entry. Players who join the ruck or maul must enter the breakdown through the gate.

Players off their feet. In promoting the contest at the breakdown, Referees will act against players who seal off the ball by going to the ground over—or on—the ball carrier. Occasionally, players who are legitimately on the ground then infringe by remaining in that position and not rolling away.

State plainly when a ruck is occurring because off-side lines then come into play. Use clear verbal communication.

Illegal charging. Strictly police the actions of players who enter the breakdown and fail to bind onto a player when they clean out. Charging into an opponent at the breakdown with the use of the shoulder and making no attempt to use the arms is to be treated as **dangerous play**.



US All-Star Sevens Championships

What *not* to do in a tackle or a ruck!

There are far more tackles in Sevens than in Fifteens, and far more tackles than rucks.

Mauls can—and do—occur in Sevens. Mostly a defensive move, mauls are usually formed to tie-up and hold up the ball carrier and force a turnover (scrum put-in). If a maul has formed, announce **MAUL** clearly to establish the off-side line and remove any confusion in case of a turnover of possession.

Exceptions: Social sides/beginning of Sevens season. Very few players at this level train specifically for Sevens. All too often you see teams trying to play Fifteen-A-Side with only seven players on the pitch. This results in unnecessary contact—in rucks and mauls—and some very tired people.

SCRUM

Possession is vital in Sevens and the set scrum is one of the major first-phase situations in which the ball is contested. Only the kick-off occurs with comparable frequency.

Manage scrums correctly for poorly managed ones will destroy the game. Be demanding and precise at the pre-engagement every time; early and consistent standards will pay dividends. The object for the Referee is to get the ball away quickly.

- With just three players on each side, Sevens scrums may prove more difficult to manage than Fifteens. Most Sevens forwards are not traditional (Fifteens) front row players, and it is somewhat unnatural for them to play in the scrum.
- You will often see all sorts of binding, particularly where the two props will attempt to bind on each other and the hooker will grab a shirt on either side while standing independently in the middle (in order to make a quick getaway). They are clearly not properly bound and it is illegal. Binding offenses carry a **penalty kick** sanction.

Law 20.3 (b)

The hooker may bind over or under the arms of the props.

The hooker must independently bind to each of the props. The props should not bind on each other. The hooker may legally overbind or underbind.

Overbinding is a more powerful option, but underbinding will put the hooker into open play more often. The overbind usually gives the hooker more push (strength), while the underbind allows more flexibility (quick release).

The hooker must remain in the scrum until the scrum is over. Allowing the hooker to leave the scrum early eliminates space and is a detriment to the game. The defending team is most likely to offend.



Dobson Images

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

Establish a stable scrum before the ball is thrown in. If necessary, reset scrums early in the match to get them right.

If a scrum is unstable, it might be prudent to position yourself on the opposite side of the put-in and observe the loose-head prop of the team not putting in the ball. Make sure that player drives straight and keeps his/her back parallel to the ground. Do not allow that player to turn in or pop up in the scrum.

Scrum (continued)

Use a full scrum count, but do not draw the scrum cadence out. Sevens scrums are not as dangerous as they are in Fifteens, so the key is getting the ball back in play as soon as possible. Ensure that the scrum cadence is always the same: **Crouch, Touch, Pause, Engage** (and given without delay).

Ensure a fair contest for the ball with a straight credible feed. Manage this aspect of the game, prior to engagement. Make sure the scrum half is square to the scrum and lined up with the tunnel. Verbally remind scrum halves of their responsibility for straight put-ins. Have them step back from the scrum before put-in, etc. **Free kick** only as a last resort.

- Remember, teams may put the ball into the scrum from either side.

Off-sides for non-participants. At the scrum, both back lines (all non-participants in the scrum) must be back five meters from the hindmost foot of the scrum. This is designed to increase the space available to the team who wins the ball at the scrum. By having all the forwards committed at the scrum itself and ten meters plus between the back lines, significant space is created in which to build an attack.



Dobson Images

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

Off-sides for scrum half. Both scrum halves must take up a position on the same side of the scrum as the scrum half throwing in the ball. The scrum half not throwing in the ball and choosing to start on the opposite side of the put-in, must be positioned behind the off-side line for the non-participants and must stay there until the scrum is over.

- After the ball has been won, the scrum half of the team who has not won the ball (and was positioned next to the player throwing in the ball), can do one of two things:
 1. Follow the ball while remaining on-side (both feet behind the ball).
 2. Retreat to the hindmost foot on his/her side of the scrum and then take up a position anywhere behind this off-side line.

Concentrate to see when the ball is out. This means controlling scrum halves not winning the ball but also allowing them to play when they are entitled to play. This phase of play happens more quickly and in a more concentrated space than in the Fifteens game. Do not allow the defending scrum half to fall or dive on the ball as it emerges. This is a **penalty offense**.

Watch for any players being held in the scrum after the ball has cleared. (The ball-winning front row is more likely to hold onto the opposition in order to give their attack more space.)

Be proactive. Use preventative measures (communication) to manage the scrum. Uphold our standards for a fair contest for possession. Only **penalize** after the failure of all reasonable attempts to manage the scrum.

WATCH FOR:

INCORRECT BINDING

Props must bind on the hooker and on the body of the opposite prop. Binding on the shorts or not binding on the opposite prop creates instability.

BREAKING BINDING EARLY

Players will often attempt to leave the scrum prematurely to make an early tackle. You must not allow hookers to leave the scrum early. It is a **penalty offense** which you can prevent by ensuring correct binding.

PUSHING EARLY

Pushing before the ball comes in.

PUSHING UP

Watch for popping up and boring in, especially popping up by the loose-head prop of the team not putting in the ball. This is **dangerous play and must be dealt with strictly.**

DROPPING THE SCRUM

Watch the body angles of the players before they engage. Encourage props to drive straight and stay in the scrum.

PULLING AROUND

It is not always easy to detect the swinging/wheeling of the scrum. This needs careful monitoring to prevent such things as pulling the scrum about. Watch for forwards on their heels. If a scrum spins quickly, it is usually deliberate. It is not something the attacking side would want as they lose any advantage. This is an **immediate penalty.**

KICKING THROUGH

The hooker kicks the ball forward through the scrum, often behind the opponent's line. This is much easier to do in Sevens and is **always a penalty offense.**

Correct Scrum Binds



Dobson Images

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

KICK-OFF/RESTART KICKS

On average, there are eight restarts in a Sevens match—which makes restarts the most frequent set piece in Sevens.

Kick-Offs And Restarts are all drop kicks. The team that scores—including a penalty kick or drop goal—must kick-off.

Ensure that all the players are behind the ball right from the first kick-off. Preventative management (talk) can minimize the need for penalties.

Start on line with the kicking team. (Starting ten meters deep usually reveals a Referee's laziness or lack of fitness.) The better positioned you are, the more effective you are as a Referee. The restart must be drop kicked from the center of the halfway line (manage).

Be prepared for changes in the direction of the kick—a chip kick over a defense playing up too tight or a short grub kick if the opposition leaves gaps. *Do not be in the way.*

Penalize infractions with a free kick:

Examples:

- Kick-off goes less than ten meters and is not first played by the receiving team.
- Ball goes directly into touch.
- Kicking-team players are off-side at the kick-off.
- Ball goes into the in-goal and is downed immediately.
- Ball goes touch-in-goal or over the dead ball line.

Be patient at the kick-off. It may be tempting to blow the whistle quickly when it appears the ball will not travel ten meters but do not rush it; allow the kick-off to fully play out.



Dobson Images

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com



Dobson Images

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

Ensure kicking-team players are on-side and not tackling players whose feet are off the ground (playing the man not the ball). Receiving-team players should not stand in front of a receiver and obstruct opponents from contesting for the ball.

Long vs Short Kick-Offs: Short kick-offs contest possession or put the receiving team under intense pressure at the point of reception. Long kick-offs put receivers under pressure before they can cross the twenty-two-meter line.

There is no set piece in Sevens that is more underrated than the kick-off.

—**Emil Signes**, former U.S. Sevens coach

LINE-OUT

Line-outs are used to restart play quickly after the ball has gone into touch.

If a team chooses to have a receiver (a player in position to catch the ball when line-out players pass or tap the ball back from the line-out), that player needs to be a full two meters back from the line-out. Referees can clarify the situation by asking, "If you're the receiver, I need you back two meters."

The receiver may join the line-out before or after the ball is thrown in. The receiver is not allowed to be in transit (motion) as the ball is being thrown in.

The non-throwing team must match the thrower. This "non-thrower" must be two meters from the line-of-touch and two meters from the five-meter line. This will prevent teams from dropping their non-thrower back ten+ meters to provide better defensive coverage in the backs.

Be prepared for many quick throw ins. A quick throw in may be thrown in straight or towards the throwing team's own goal line. This is important because it allows teams a chance to counterattack before their opponents have had a chance to get into defensive alignment. The ball must still travel five meters and cross the five-meter line, before it touches the ground or another player.

Another type of quick throw in can occur when players throw the ball in to themselves. This is permissible if it travels five meters, crosses the five-meter line, and goes in straight or towards one's own goal line before the line-out has formed.

When a quick throw in is not allowed, the ball must be thrown in straight, and travel at least five meters before it touches the ground or it touches or is touched by a player.

Line-out players may pre-grip a jumper before the ball is thrown in. However, support players must wait until the ball has left the hands of the player throwing it in before lifting their teammate.

Do not allow "early jumping" in the line-out. Manage the situation first by resetting the line-out and warning the players to get their timing correct. Award a **free kick** if teams persist in jumping early after an initial warning.

Numbers matter in the line-out. The team throwing in the ball at the line-out determines the maximum number of players in the line-out. (Only count those players on the line-of-touch, do not include the receiver.) The opposing team may have fewer line-out players but may not have more than the team throwing in the ball.



Hong Kong Sevens

Be sure the quick throw in is allowable:

1. The same ball that went into touch is the one being thrown in.
2. No player, other than the one who is throwing it in, touched the ball since it was released in touch.
3. The ball is thrown in between where it went into touch and the player's goal line.
4. If a line-out has not yet formed (two players from each team at the line of touch). Players who approach the line-of-touch must do so without delay.

Make sure the ball is released immediately after being carried into touch.

Do not allow players to hang on to the ball and delay the game. **Penalty Kick.**

Do not be afraid to stand at the back of the line-out. Consider taking a position at the back of the line-out on the line of touch (middle). This will place you in a better position for the next phase of play (fewer steps to get there) and help you to determine if the throw is straight. This is not for Fifteens but is helpful in Sevens.



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Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

Ball must travel five meters. However, you must make sure that the ball travels at least five meters when thrown in the line-out. Either rely on your assistant referee or move to the front of the line-out occasionally to keep each team honest.

Two-handed take. In order to maintain the offside line, teams sometimes choose to hold the ball in a line-out instead of tapping it back. Should this happen, watch for back lines infringing the ten meters and deal with them appropriately—subject of course to advantage.

All players must allow the ball to be thrown in five meters. Free kick.

Sevens is all about possession. The key requirements are to win the ball and keep the ball.

—**Wayne Smith**, former New Zealand Sevens coach

ADVANTAGE

In Sevens, quality possession IS advantage.

The purpose of advantage is to make play more continuous with fewer stoppages for infringements.



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Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

Unpressured possession with options is generally considered **Advantage Gained** for scrum infractions, regardless of position on the pitch.

Clean possession to the gain line is generally considered **Advantage Gained** for penalty infractions.

Advantage in Sevens is therefore usually shorter in duration, as opposed to Fifteens.

However, do not be afraid to play a long advantage when called for, even if the attacking side appears to be going backwards. It may take them some time to work their way through the defense. During last year's IRB Sevens World Series almost half of the tries scored in the Men's Tournament originated in the scoring team's own half.

No matter how play develops, always call out (verbalize) **ADVANTAGE (color of team awarded advantage)** and if over, **ADVANTAGE OVER**. Clear communication to the players is important. It lets the player know you are aware of the infraction, but are willing to allow the non-offending team's actions to determine play.



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REFEREE POSITIONING IN OPEN-PLAY

A Referee should be positioned for quick access to the breakdown.

The best position gets you to the breakdown quicker. The Referee needs to be slightly ahead to make up for the speed of the players. The temptation is to run behind the defensive line in front of play in the direction where play is going. This front or defense line running may lead to the Referee getting too far in front of play. Often it means running back to tackles and having difficulty in picking up the first offense. Referees sometime position themselves deep to avoid interfering with play, but this only distances you from play.



Dave Stephenson/Numina Photo

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

NOTE: The farther you are from a breakdown, the less effective you are. The closer and quicker you are, the easier it is to get it right.

Be in line to see forward passes. Being out of position may mean that a significant number of forward passes are missed. Remember, passing in Sevens is more frequent than in Fifteens. Move with the ball so you can see forward passes and you can be there at the next tackle, i.e. *line ball running*. Being slightly ahead also means that you are likely to be out of the way of passes. In Sevens, the pass is often used for a sudden switch of direction; you do not want to be in the way of that!

Be prepared to cover the entire pitch. Working to take an inside position (towards the open side) at each breakdown can put you in a good spot to see the current play, and be ready for the next phase of play. However, it is not recommended that you remain in the very center of the pitch because there are many, many tackles in Sevens and the players expect the Referee to be right there, managing every tackle. You need to be ready to get out wide quickly when long passes lead to fast moving play at the edges of the pitch. Do not just follow a lazy path in the middle of the pitch.



Dave Stephenson/Numina Photo

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

Always move toward the ball—especially when the offense backs up with possession. This is similar to a boxer cutting off the ring on his opponent. Think in terms of the ring being the touchline nearest the ball and the line of the attackers.

NOTE: On the other hand, short cuts are more available to you in Sevens than in Fifteens because the field is less cluttered with players in the way.

Positioning (continued)

There is no substitute for pace and the ability to accelerate (linear speed) and side step (lateral speed).

—Lee Smith, IRB Regional Development Manager - Oceania

Footwork. Sevens Referees need to keep moving during a match. Some Referees get into bad habits when refereeing less skilled teams and stand still and rely on their speed to catch up with play. However, as the skills and physical abilities of teams increase, this reliance on speed to always catch up will let you down. By moving your feet and continuously working in the direction of play, you will be better able to accelerate and keep up with play as the teams make breaks and sprint down the field. It is far easier to increase your speed when you are already in motion than it is to sprint from a standing start.

NOTE: Constantly adjust your body angle towards play (always directly facing the ball). You will then already be moving in the direction of the break and save the steps necessary to change direction.

NOTE: Top Sevens players spend many hours perfecting their footwork in order to become more efficient and effective in play. They know one or two steps could mean the difference between their being tackled or scoring a try. There is no reason not to extend this thinking to your refereeing; one or two steps could mean the difference between your making the correct call and catching the second (or third) infraction—or missing the call altogether.



Dobson Images

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

Always be alert to the overload or the missed tackle. You have a head start, but you will still need to get on your horse if you want to be in the frame with the try. Show some urgency and work hard to be in position to make the correct call.

When a turnover occurs in open play, you need to quickly take up the mirror-image position from where you have just been. This may be one of the trickiest but most elegant of referee transitions, slipping through both lines without affecting either.

When following a player who is running free, you should instantly begin checking your rear-view mirror. You might be on course to interfere with a defender on the far side of the pitch—just at the critical instant! A small mid-course correction, often by merely slowing down briefly, will allow the pace of the players to decide the outcome.

Always yield to the defenders. For whatever reason, you may occasionally find play coming directly towards you. Stop and hold your position. Be prepared to sidestep the action if necessary; then turn and sprint *immediately* to keep up with play.

Sevens matches are unpredictable tests of stamina, ball-handling expertise and blistering pace.

—Jack Pollard, sports historian

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON POSITIONING IN OPEN PLAY

by Paul Bretz
USARugby High Performance Referee

Several years ago rugby officials were taught to stay behind the defensive side of the gainline, similar to a football referee standing in the linebacker position. The purpose of taking this linebacker position was to remain out of the way, stay in vertical alignment with the ball carrier on a breakaway. However the linebacker position did not provide the means to properly manage the tackle/breakdown because the officials cannot properly recognize the release of the ball before the defenders attempt to [take] the ball from the ball carrier.

Sevens referees are now being instructed to stay behind the team going forward and imposing pressure on the opposition. The team that is being placed under pressure is more apt to commit penalties in order to stop the pressure being implemented. Officials who are behind the team going forward are in a much better position, particularly at the tackle, to see pressure induced penalties.

Often times if the defensive unit is disciplined, settled, and in line with each other they are pushing the ball carrying team backwards as the offensive unit moves the ball back and forth across the field looking to find a gap to exploit. If a forward moving defender tackles the ball carrier while the carrier is going backwards the ball carrier tends to find himself alone, with his support in an offside position and scrambling to enter the gate from their own side. Once again the referee in the attacking position is apt to see the pressure induced penalty, this time from the ball carrying team.

Due to the dynamic nature of Sevens the attacking team changes more quickly in Sevens than it does in Fifteens. The official should be as close to the ball as possible so as to slip behind the team going forward. Approach to the breakdown should be from the side at a 45-degree angle for optimum visibility of all players entering the tackle zone. Side entry approach for the referee will give him the means to transition easier to the next phase, provided the referee's approach to the

breakdown is from the wide side of the field, and will also give him the chance to stay with the ball should it be picked up or kicked away from the breakdown.



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If the referee approaches the breakdown from the saddle position he is apt to miss gate entry offenses and will find himself out of position on the next phase in play if quick ball is produced and spun wide. *P.B.*

AWARDING PENALTIES

Be prepared for penalties to be taken quickly.

Work to allow the quick tap.



Courtesy of USA Sevens LLC

Penalty Mark

Work on getting the offenders back ten meters if the team awarded a penalty knows where the penalty mark is. Devote your attention to preventing another penalty, not to running over and indicating a particular spot of grass. Give the mark at penalties (pointing is sufficient) and **get out of the way!**

Pointing to the Penalty Mark

By pointing to the penalty mark, you can facilitate quick penalty taps and increase the time that the ball is in play. Frequently a Referee will allow play to continue after a penalty infraction to see if an ADVANTAGE can be gained. If an ADVANTAGE cannot be gained and the Referee blows up play, players from the non-offending team will naturally move towards the Referee for the location of the penalty mark (and take the quick tap). Referees can avoid having to stop playing time and resetting the mark by vigorously pointing back to the original point of the infraction (correct penalty mark) and verbally instructing the non-offending team exactly where they need to go in order to restart play.

Position

Find a position at the penalty that works for you, keeps you out of the way and does not slow the game down. Make sure the mark is taken correctly, the ball is kicked out of hand (manage) and ensure the offending team gets back.

Work the "10"

Insist that the offending team retreat ten meters from the mark and do not allow them to slow the quick tap. Use all the tools at your disposal to get those requisite ten meters. Teams not getting back ten meters from the penalty mark eliminate space and have a negative, destructive influence.

Allow some latitude in the taking of the mark.

Do not call the quick tap back unless it is taken significantly far from the mark (the "manhole rule"), and/or allows an unfair advantage to the non-offending team.

FOUL/DANGEROUS PLAY

YELLOW/RED CARDS

Foul play is against the letter and spirit of the game.



Pakiscorner.com

Courtesy of USA Sevens LLC

Use common sense. Manage the game, but be ready to use all the tools available if left with no choice. If something occurs during a match that appears to you to be dangerous play—it probably is—and must be dealt with strictly. Do not hesitate to remove players from the field who are guilty of foul and dangerous play.

Teams are seriously disadvantaged by a temporary suspension and an inaccurate decision may have a major affect on the outcome of the game. Yellow cards should not be given lightly— but when they are deserved, do not hesitate.

Watch for professional fouls and repeated infringements. Do not confuse a blatant intent to spoil (deliberate infringement) with overeagerness. It is okay to award penalties and free kicks as they are part of the game. It is not okay to allow negative play that is clearly intended to spoil.

Do not turn your back on the ball, even after blowing the whistle. Manage the dead ball and stay involved to calm potential flash points. Pay attention but do not get too close.



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I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. BUT I KNOW IT WHEN I SEE IT . . . — U.S. Justice Potter Stewart, concurring opinion on obscenity in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* 378 U.S. 184 (1964)

Use common sense!

Judge each tackle on its merit.

Determine fact, not intent.

1. High tackles or those made without the use of the hands/arms.
2. Tackles that begin below the shoulder line but “ride up” and contact the head area.
3. Shirt pulling
4. Throwing or taking the ball away after a penalty award.
5. Repeatedly killing the ball at the tackle. (Again, use common sense.) Killing the ball at the tackle once is worth a penalty, but killing it two or three times should earn a yellow card.

Deal with dust ups with certainty and consistency.

Stay calm. Do not throw gasoline onto what are only embers and cause an inferno.

Keep your **hands off the players.**

Use your whistle—it is your only weapon. Players are used to reacting to the whistle. It goes off and they stop playing; it goes off and they may well stop wrestling.



Courtesy of USA Sevens LLC

Be decisive when things calm down. You may consult the Assistant Referees or In-Goal Judges, but ultimately you are the closest and in charge.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Increasing the time that the ball is in play is a major objective of the Sevens Referee.

With Sevens matches only fourteen minutes long (Cup Finals are twenty minutes long and Fifteens matches are eighty minutes long), time is a very valuable commodity. Exercise time management to ensure every one of those minutes—no, seconds—is available for play.



uncredited

Wasting time, e.g., throwing or kicking the ball away after a penalty or line-out has been awarded, should be **penalized promptly** and roundly discouraged.

The Referee would be well advised to **stop the game clock** and negate any attempts by players to slow play and take time off the clock in order to protect a close lead or cover for their lack of fitness.

If a scrum or line-out is awarded before time has elapsed, the referee will still have the scrum or line-out, regardless of the time on the game clock. If the Referee gives the scrum or the ball goes out to touch after time has elapsed, then halftime or fulltime is called and play ends.

Parameters for allowing restarts before time runs out.

1. The Referee needs to be aware that the game is getting close to half or full time.
2. If a try is scored with more than forty seconds remaining on the game clock, the Referee will advise the conversion kicker prior to the kick being taken that they will be going back to halfway to restart with a kick off. By law, the kicker must take the conversion kick within forty seconds of a try having been scored. Therefore, when the Referee checks the time when a try is awarded (on the scoreboard, or more likely on his/her wrist) and there are more than forty seconds left in the half, the Referee is obligated to allow a restart and plays on until the next infringement.
3. In the rare instance when a penalty kick is attempted near the end of a half/game, thirty seconds would be the benchmark. If a penalty is awarded with more than thirty seconds left in the half (not when the team decides to kick for goal), then a restart should be allowed.

It is important that the Sevens Referee keep accurate time and clearly communicate game time status to each team. It is not enough for the Referee to be correct in law, but he/she needs to make each team fully aware of the match's circumstances to avoid any misunderstandings. This becomes even more critical in absence of a stadium scoreboard clock or buzzer/hooter.

ASSISTANT REFEREES

Teamwork between the Referee, Assistant Referees and In-Goal Judges is absolutely essential.



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Assistant Referees have TWO key roles:

1. Running and flagging touch.
2. Reporting on foul play.

It is a *bonus* if you can help the Referee in any additional way.

Quick line-outs/quick throw ins. Assistant Referees can assist by signaling and getting to the mark quickly. Remember while a quick throw in does not have to be straight, it must not be thrown forward towards the opponent's goal line. Make sure the ball is only handled by the player taking the quick throw in.

Reporting. Make a foul play call regardless of whether you believe the Referee has seen the offense(s). However, you need to be absolutely certain that an offense has occurred; no guessing or being influenced by the crowd.

- Communicate that you have a report as soon as you observe an offense. Call out: **1. (REFEREE'S NAME); 2. I HAVE A FOUL PLAY REPORT ON (TEAM COLOR).** Remember that Referees will probably play on until the next infringement—unless they agree with you that the offending team has been able to play on unfairly because of the illegality. Continue your normal touch duties until the Referee stops play.
- At the next stoppage of play, often when a try has been scored, raise your flag and move quickly towards the Referee. The Assistant Referee and the Referee then communicate. The Referee will initiate and lead the conversation. There is no need for a Board meeting, unless the other Assistant Referee or an In-Goal Judge thinks they have something to add to the situation.
- The Assistant Referee will give the offending player's number and team. (In Sevens there is rarely an excuse for not being able to supply the number!)
 - Concentrate on the offender until the number can be identified.
 - Give a precise and accurate description of the offense.
 - The Referee may request a sanction recommendation:
 1. Severe reprimand (**Admonishment**)
 2. Formal caution and temporary suspension (**Yellow Card**)
 3. Send off (**Red Card**)

NOTE: Help at the scrum by marking the five-meter off-side line. In order to be on-side, both sets of backs (except the halfbacks) must be five meters behind the hindmost player of their team.

Kicks. Trailing Assistant Referees, in particular, should be in position to assist with any incidents of obstruction or the *taking out* of players after a kick or pass. They will also be critical in observing late, high or dangerous tackles. Shoulder charges and tackles around the collar, including from behind the ball carrier, *must* be reported to the Referee.

Scrum. Be watchful that no players are being held in the scrum after the ball has been cleared. (The ball-winning front row is likely to hold in the opposition in order to give their attack more space.)

Time wasting. Be alert to the possibility of either team throwing the ball away beyond touch or the dead ball line. Report incidents to the Referee, who will then make a decision.



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Secondary Duties

1. Indicate ten meters back from penalty and free kicks.
2. Mark ten meters back from line-out on the non-throwing side.
3. Mark five meters behind the hindmost foot in the scrum
4. Give Referee discreet signals for clear and obvious knock on or throw forwards. If in communication with Referee, do not signal but say Referee's Name, then Team Color and Infraction.

DO NOT COMMUNICATE IF THE REFEREE IS PLAYING ADVANTAGE.

If you are in radio communication with the Referee, work on the principle of **LESS IS BEST** and only use the system if there is something vital to communicate.

Assistant Referee Positioning

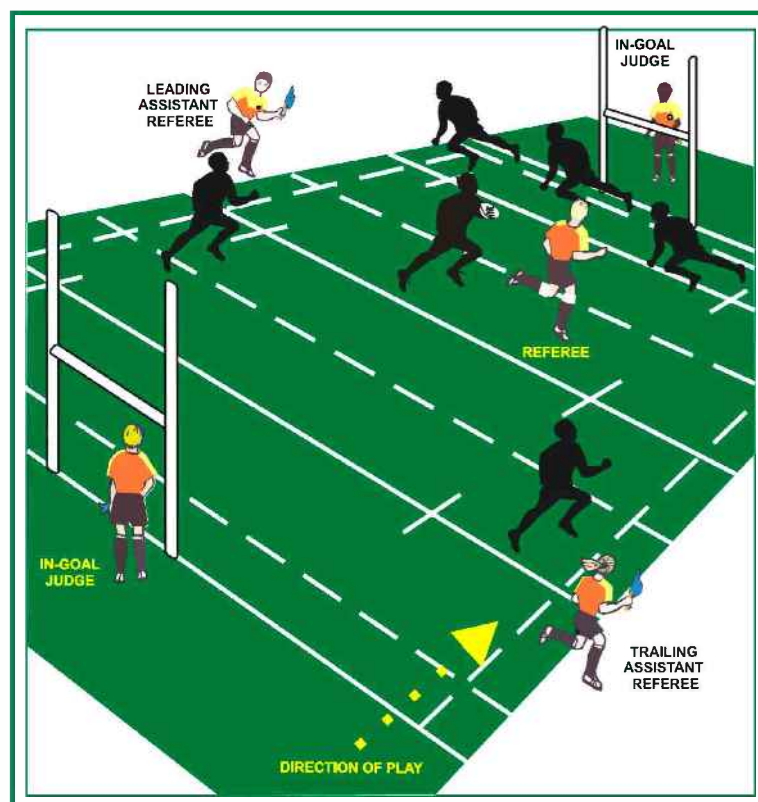
Assistant Referees on the touchline should adopt the leading-trailing positions.

Appropriate **Leading** Positioning:

The leading Assistant Referee is the one on the touchline to whom the ball is traveling.

Appropriate **Trailing** Positioning:

The trailing Assistant Referee is the one on the touchline from where the ball is traveling, and remains behind play to watch players behind the Referee—not the ball. (This is one of the most difficult aspects of effective touch judging.)



- Be aware of the position of both the Referee and the other Assistant Referee.
- Leading and Trailing positions usually allow all players to be monitored.

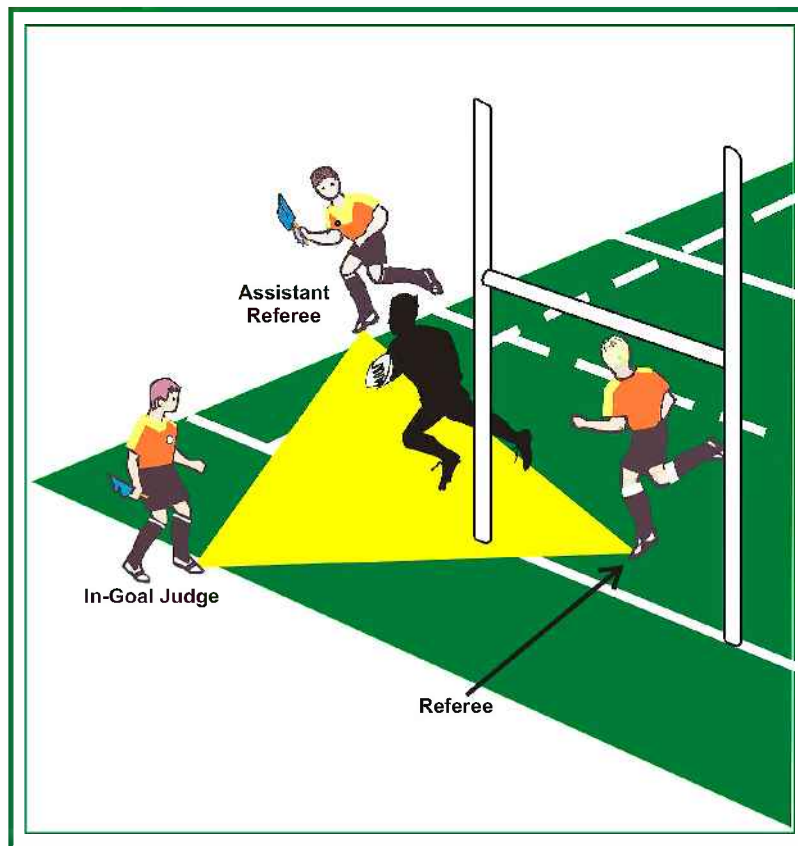
Near The Goal Line:

- The Assistant Referee closest to play will not attempt to get in goal.
- The Assistant Referee trailing looks for touch, pulling back of defenders or support players.
- The Referee, Assistant Referee and In-Goal Judge use the principle of **triangulation**.



Dave Stephenson/Numina Photo

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com



IN-GOAL JUDGES

In-Goal Judges always keep active—moving across the in-goal so they can observe the touch down of the ball.

Positioning. You must move from touch in-goal line to opposite touch in-goal line and concentrate fully at all times. It is perfectly acceptable to take a position inside the in-goal area to gain a better vantage point, but make sure you are out of the way of play.

Tries – Move as quickly as possible to the position where you anticipate the try is going to be scored. Follow/be in line with the player who is attempting to get closer to the posts. Establish eye contact with the Referee **before** offering any decision on play.

Kicks At Goal – Position yourself where you are comfortable and be prepared to move.

Primary Duties

- Adjudicate tries or touch downs
- Adjudicate kicks at goal
- Adjudicate ball dead
- Report foul play

Reporting foul play. You are responsible for reporting foul play that occurs in the in-goal area, including after the ball has been touched down.

The In-Goal Judge and the Referee then communicate. Use the same practices as the Assistant Referee (page 22).

Time wasting. Be aware that either team may attempt to throw away the ball. Report this to the Referee, who will then make a decision. You can help speed up play after a try by throwing the ball back into the field of play for the conversion attempt if the ball is merely left there by the try scorer.



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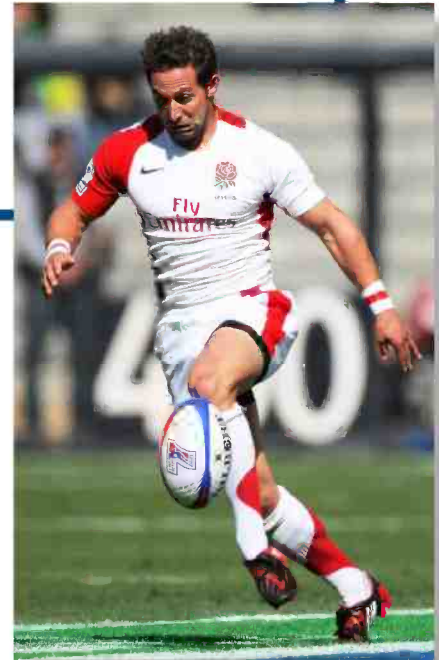
While observing the ball, be aware of the environment around the ball carriers. Have they been tripped, etc., in in-goal, thereby preventing them from getting closer to the posts? This is very important when conversions are drop kicks.

KICKING IN SEVENS

Despite all the emphasis on possession, remember that tactical kicking may be useful. A well-placed, well-timed kick into open space may prove to be a match winner.

Situations In Which Kicking May Be Used:

1. Make a grub or chip kick if opponents come up fast and without a sweeper.
2. Make a grub or chip kick that forces the opposition to turn and chase back.
3. Relieve pressure.
4. Upset the rhythm and composure of a favored opponent.
5. Make a kick down the narrow side.
6. Relieve a stalemate and force something to happen.
7. For touch and the line-out (wind advantage, good jumpers).
8. Make use of conditions, e.g. wind or rain.
9. Kill time or end the game.



Numinaphotos.com

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Be vigilant for the late hit or obstruction that prevents kickers from chasing their own kick. This must be dealt with sternly as it may have a direct affect on the outcome of the game. Possible yellow card and/or penalty try.

There is no gain in ground if a team puts the ball back into its own 22 and the ball is subsequently kicked directly into touch. Teams will no longer be able to pass or play the ball back into their own 22 and then kick directly to touch in order to gain ground.



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All kicks for points must be drop kicks. This includes a penalty goal in the last seconds to win the match.

Conversion goals must be taken within forty seconds of a try being scored.

During attempts at conversion goals, opposing team members must immediately assemble close to their own ten-meter line. Do not allow them to loiter and distract the kicker.

FITNESS

Referees need more power-based speed in Sevens than in Fifteens. Sevens players are likely to be faster than any Sevens match Referee. That means you need every bit of your speed—backed by stamina.

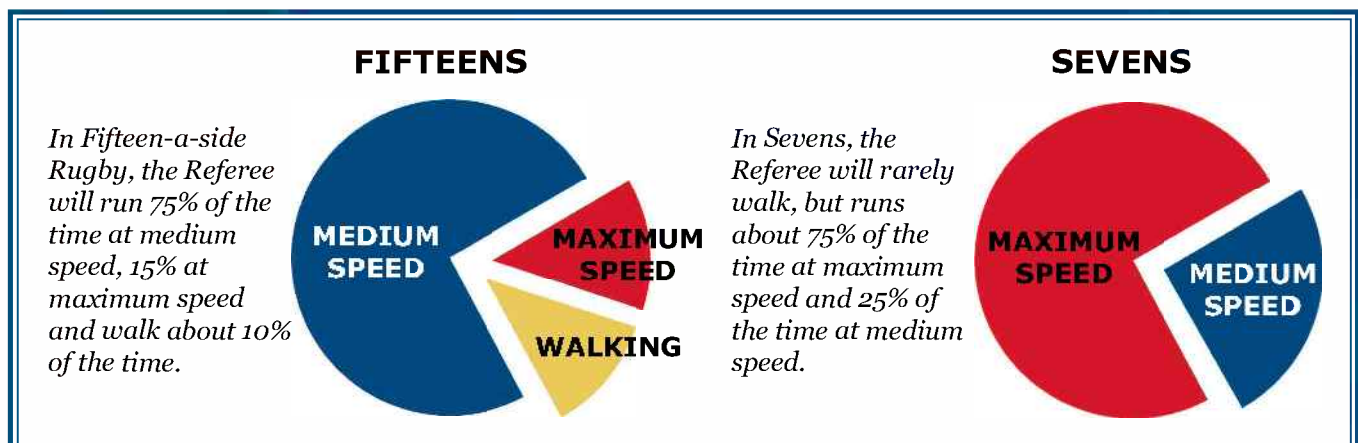
- **The type of fitness and stamina required in Sevens is different than in Fifteens** because of the gaps in the day's play. The Sevens Referee warms up, sweats it out for about fifteen furious minutes, warms down and then waits for the next short burst of activity. In addition, as the day or weekend progresses, the intensity of each game increases because there is more at stake.
- **Stretching** is very important, pre-game (dynamic) and post-game (static). Attention to hydration, regardless of the temperature, is vital.
- **Speed, stamina, poise and composure**—give you the ability to think and act quickly without panicking.
- **Physical fitness** is very important. If you are not physically fit:
 1. You may not be able to get to the best positions to referee all the phases of the match, particularly crucial for goal-line decisions.
 2. Your concentration levels will drop as the game progresses.
 3. Your credibility among the players, coaches and other Referees will suffer.
- **Mental fitness** is equally as important as physical fitness. It is essential that you are able to maintain your concentration for the duration of the game.
- **Mental stamina** is required to manage pressure from the crowd and the coaches.



Dave Stephenson/Numina Photo

Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

**IF YOU ARE NOT PHYSICALLY FIT,
YOU WILL NOT BE MENTALLY FIT!**



SEVEN-A-SIDE BASICS

Coaching Sevens Rugby - By Wayne Smith

Wayne Smith was one of New Zealand's best Sevens players from 1984 to 1988 and coached the New Zealand Sevens team from 1990-92. He is now Assistant Coach for the All-Blacks.

**Sevens is all about POSSESSION.
The key requirements are to WIN THE BALL and KEEP THE BALL.**

1. Attack = possession. You must have the ability to win the ball and retain it, even when going backwards, sideways and under pressure.
2. Clear pressure immediately. You must move the ball away from areas of congestion immediately, rather than pick it up and run. The exception to this is when you're close to the goal line.
3. Use the full width of the field. Stretch the defense, make the gaps bigger.
4. Maintain depth in attack. This may require you to step backwards after passing the ball, thus giving the ball carrier an option to pass back to you. A deep attack is effective and has options. Attacking players should always be available.
5. Support is vital. Players must support in their zone, rather than chase and have their 'nose to the ball' as a support player would do in traditional rugby.
6. Create options. As the ball moves towards your zone, create options by changing angles, calling, feinting and generally trying to confuse the defense. Players should try to be a threat to the defense.
7. Defense = pressure. Reduce opposition's time and space. Come up together, and move across as a unit, keeping body angles pointing outwards. There is no off-side from general play.
8. Man-on-man defense. Pick up the correct man by counting from the outsides. Communicate who your man is.
9. Zonal defense. Mark a man within a zone. If players switch angles, pick up the new player that comes into your zone.
10. Watch the ball less. Too much ball watching gives your man the opportunity to change lines/angles and make a break.
11. Sweep. Someone must cover kicks-through and breaks. Sweeping can be done by the outside players (thus the defense is umbrella-shaped with the wings back a bit) or there can be a permanent sweeper.
12. Total defense. This involves good body angles, cover, picking up a man within your zone, watching the player more than the ball and aggressive ball and all tackles.



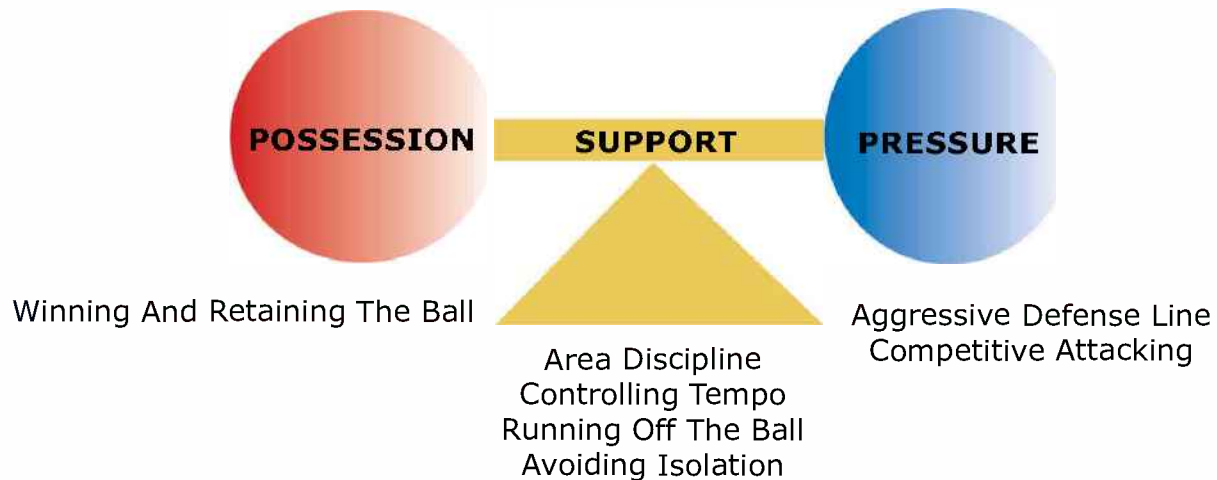
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Courtesy of RugbyMag.com

—From the *New Zealand Rugby Sevens Handbook*

CONCEPTS OF SEVENS RUGBY

Sevens rugby is a possession game and it is a pressure game—the link between the two is support.



THE SEVEN TECHNIQUES OF SEVENS

- 1. GAIN AND RETAIN POSSESSION:** Possession is 99.9 % of the game. By possession is meant quality possession; once won, it must be retained by good, constant support work and good handling. You cannot win without it and the opposition cannot score without it.
- 2. AREA DISCIPLINE:** The field should be divided into seven areas (lanes) running parallel to the touchline. A player should be positioned in each area. Positional discipline should be maintained in both attack and defense.
- 3. CONTROL TEMPO:** The tempo of the game should be controlled by retaining possession; good support and making the ball do the work.
- 4. RUN OFF THE BALL:** As each player has passed the ball, they take a stride or two towards the player they have just passed to, thus taking up a position slightly to one side but behind the player to whom they have just given the ball. This will ensure good support for the player in possession. Always try to have one player behind the player with the ball.
- 5. NEVER BE ISOLATED:** Always run towards support. No player should ever become isolated.
- 6. DEFENSIVE ALIGNMENT:** The best method of defense is the straight-line defense [a straight line of six players, positioned flat across the field opposite their opponents] with cover being provided by a sweeper lying 10+ meters back in line with the ball. The sweeper is supported by the blindside winger. Marking should be man for man with area discipline observed.
- 7. PRESSURE:** Sevens is a pressure game; when you have possession of the ball aim to grasp the initiative and challenge the opposition, always being careful to keep the ball away from pressure; when the opposition have possession attempt to pressure them into making errors which force a breakdown.

Above all else, Sevens is a thinking game demanding concentration and effort, particularly when you are not in possession of the ball. Running off the ball is vital. Sevens is a game in which everybody is in the game all the time.

—From *RUGBY SEVENS*, by Mike Williams

SEVENS COACHING TERMS

Pocket—All teams must have a playmaker or an outlet player standing in space, directly behind the tackle. The ball can be cleared to this player from the tackle to remount an attack.

There is an unbending rule that following the breakdown, the ball MUST BE moved away from the area of congestion IMMEDIATELY. It is fundamental that the ball be passed, scooped or kicked out rather than run out from the area close to a breakdown. The exception of course is if a try can be scored.

—Wayne Smith

The area that most teams can improve on is getting support players into the pocket and make sure that there is depth in support to ensure continuity in the attack.

My three key principles of coaching Sevens are support play, depth and use of width of the field.

—Gordon Tietjens, New Zealand Sevens coach

Sweeper—A player who covers behind the defensive line is essential to cut-off kicks and cover breaks. If a team has pace, the sweeper can come from the opposite wing and they can defend with seven players across the field. If they lack pace, they should defend with six in the front line as they may not expect the wing to act as sweeper. (It is too far for the player to go, should penetration take place.)

The sweeper, who is in a fullback position, has a job to shadow the ball and hold up the attack so that the defensive team can get back and regroup. The rule of thumb is the quicker the sweeper, the deeper he can stand. This is why on attack if a break is made you have to try to get the ball to your speed as quickly as possible as the goal is not to give the defensive side time to reorganize their defense.

—Gordon Tietjens

One-On-One Defense—One-on-one marking is a vital part of good defense. The emphasis should be to concentrate on the player, and not on the ball. (Use peripheral vision to be aware of the ball movement.) Too much ball-watching by defenders can allow their opponents to create openings and overlaps by running off the ball into new positions.

Zone Defense—From the outset players will find themselves guarding certain avenues on the field. These will remain their responsibility until a breakdown in play. Players will not always slot into the same area. How well they defend their zone depends on agility, good lateral movement, communication, peripheral vision and decision making.

Teams should defend inside out, giving the ball carrier only one direction to go.

—Lee Smith

MATCH OFFICIALS' OBJECTIVE

To be unobtrusive and accurate—
allowing the players to display their skills



Courtesy of USA Sevens LLC

and provide exciting tournaments leading to

ENJOYMENT FOR ALL!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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My fellow referees who have taught me so much, on and off the pitch...

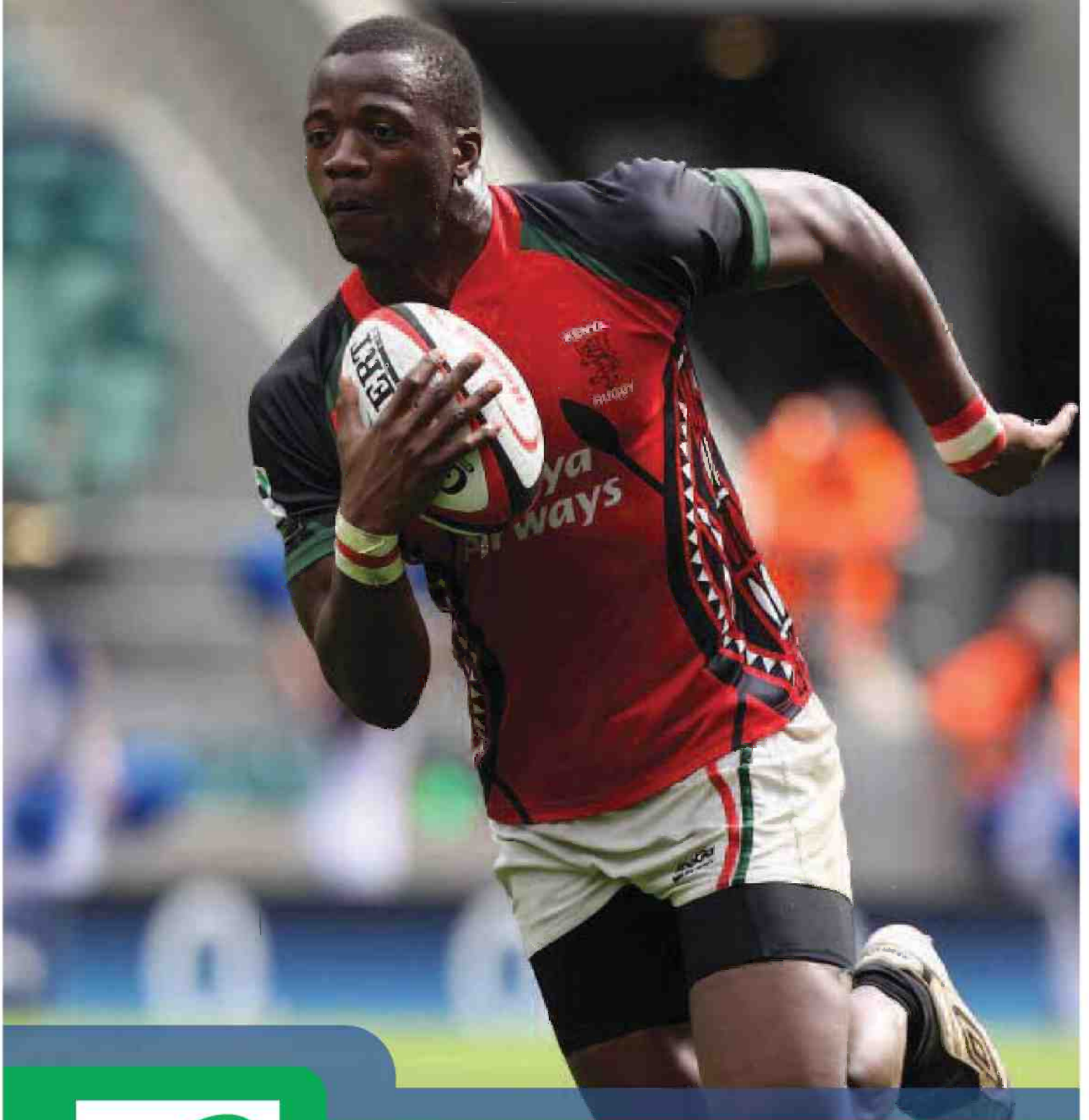
and especially Nola and Liam, whose love and support make it all possible.

Patrick McNally

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Courtesy of USA Sevens LLC





SEVEN-A-SIDE VARIATIONS

Standard set of variations appropriate to the Seven-a-side Game



The Laws of the Game apply to the seven-a-side game, subject to the following variations:

LAW 3: NUMBER OF PLAYERS – THE TEAM

3.1 MAXIMUM NUMBER OF PLAYERS ON THE PLAYING AREA

Maximum: each team must have no more than seven players on the playing area.

3.4 PLAYERS NOMINATED AS SUBSTITUTES

A team may nominate no more than five replacements/substitutes.

A team can substitute or replace up to three players.

3.12 SUBSTITUTED PLAYERS REJOINING THE MATCH

If a player is substituted, that player must not return and play in that match even to replace an injured player.

Exception: A substituted player may replace a player with a bleeding or open wound.

LAW 5: TIME

5.1 DURATION OF A MATCH

A match lasts no longer than fourteen minutes plus lost time and extra time. A match is divided into two halves of not more than seven minutes playing time.

Exception: A competition final match may last no longer than twenty minutes plus lost time and extra time. The match is divided into two halves of not more than ten minutes playing time.



5.2 HALF TIME

After half time the teams change ends. There is an interval of not more than two minutes.

5.6 PLAYING EXTRA TIME

When there is a drawn match and extra time is required, after a break of one minute the extra time is played in periods of five minutes. After each period, the teams change ends without an interval.

LAW 6: MATCH OFFICIALS

6.A. REFEREE

6.A.12. DUTIES OF THE REFEREE AFTER THE MATCH

Add extra paragraph:

Extra Time - Toss.

Before extra time starts, the referee organises a toss. One of the captains tosses a coin and the other captain calls to see who wins the toss. The winner of the toss decides whether to kick off or choose an end. If the winner of the toss decides to choose an end, the opponents must kick off and vice versa.

6.B. TOUCH JUDGES

6.B.8 IN-GOAL JUDGES

- There are two in-goal judges for each match.
- The referee has the same control over both in-goal judges as the referee has over touch judges.
- There is only one in-goal judge in each in-goal area.



- (d) **Signalling result of kick at goal.** When a conversion kick or a penalty kick at goal is being taken, an in-goal judge must help the referee by signalling the result of the kick. If the ball goes over the crossbar and between the posts, the in-goal judge raises the flag to indicate a goal.
- (e) **Signalling touch.** When the ball or the ball carrier has gone into touch-in-goal, the in-goal judge must hold up the flag.
- (f) **Signalling tries.** The in-goal judge will assist the referee in decisions on touch downs and tries if there is any doubt in the referee's mind.
- (g) **Signalling foul play.** A match organiser may give authority for the in-goal judge to signal foul play in the in-goal.

LAW 9: METHOD OF SCORING

9.B CONVERSION KICK

9.B.1 TAKING A CONVERSION KICK

Amend

- (c) The kick must be a drop kick.

Delete (d)

Amend

- (e) The kicker must take the kick within forty seconds of a try having been scored. The kick is disallowed if the kicker does not take the kick in the time allowed.



9.B.3 THE OPPOSING TEAM

Amend

- (a) All the opposing team must immediately assemble close to their own 10-metre line.

Delete (b)

- (c) Delete 3rd paragraph “When another kick is allowed.....”

9.B.4. EXTRA TIME – THE WINNER

In extra time, the team that scores points first is immediately declared the winner, without any further play.

LAW 10: FOUL PLAY

Note: Temporary Suspension: When a player has been temporarily suspended, the player’s period of suspension will be for a period of two minutes.

LAW 13: KICK-OFF AND RESTART KICKS

13.2 WHO TAKES THE KICK-OFF AND RESTART KICK

Amend

- (c) After a score, the team that has scored kicks off with a drop kick which must be taken at or behind the centre of the half way line.

Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.

Amend

13.3 POSITION OF THE KICKER’S TEAM AT THE KICK OFF

All the kicker’s team must be behind the ball when it is kicked. If they are not, a free kick is awarded to the non-offending team at the centre of the half way line.

Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.



Amend

13.7 KICK-OFF OF UNDER 10 METRES AND NOT PLAYED BY AN OPPONENT

If the ball does not reach the opponents' 10-metre line, a free kick is awarded to the non-offending team at the centre of the half way line.

Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.

Amend

13.8 BALL GOES DIRECTLY INTO TOUCH

The ball must land in the field of play. If it is kicked directly into touch, a free kick is awarded to the non-offending team at the centre of the half way line.

Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.

Amend

13.9 BALL GOES INTO THE IN-GOAL

- (b) If the opposing team grounds the ball, or if they make it dead, or if the ball becomes dead by going into touch-in-goal or on or over the dead ball line a free kick is awarded to the non-offending team at the centre of the half way line.

Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.



LAW 20: SCRUM

DEFINITIONS

Amend 2nd paragraph:

A scrum is formed in the field of play when three players from each team, bound together in one row, close up with their opponents so that the heads of the players are interlocked. This creates a tunnel into which a scrum half throws in the ball so that the players can compete for possession by hooking the ball with either of their feet.

Amend 4th paragraph:

The tunnel is the space between the two rows of players.

Amend 6th paragraph:

The middle line is an imaginary line on the ground in the tunnel beneath the line where the shoulders of the two rows of players meet.

Amend 7th paragraph:

The middle player is the hooker.

Delete paragraphs 9, 10 and 11.

20.1 FORMING A SCRUM

Amend

- (e) **Number of players: three.** A scrum must have three players from each team. All three players must stay bound to the scrum until it ends.

Sanction: Penalty kick

Delete

Exception



20.8 FRONT ROW PLAYERS

Amend

- (c) **Kicking out.** A front-row player must not intentionally kick the ball out of the tunnel or out of the scrum in the direction of the opponent's goal line.

Sanction: Penalty kick

LAW 21: PENALTY AND FREE KICKS

21.3 HOW THE PENALTY AND FREE KICKS ARE TAKEN

Amend

- (a) Any player may take a penalty or free kick awarded for an infringement with any kind of kick: punt, drop kick but not a place kick. The ball may be kicked with any part of the leg from below the knee to the toe but not with the heel.

21.4 PENALTY AND FREE KICK OPTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Amend

- (b) **No delay.** If a kicker indicates to the referee the intention to kick at goal, the kick must be taken within thirty seconds of the penalty having been awarded. If the 30 seconds is exceeded the kick is disallowed, a scrum is ordered at the place of the mark and the opponents throw in the ball.