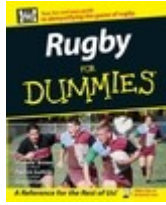




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Introducing the Rugby Players

*Adapted From:* [Rugby For Dummies](#)

Rugby is one of the few sports that caters to all sorts of body shapes and sizes. A photograph of a rugby team often looks as if one specimen of every human body type has been assembled at the same spot, at the same time, to provide an illustration for an anthropological study.

A quick scan of any team during practice is proof that everyone can play the game. Within every team, the tall, the small, the fat, the skinny, and everyone in between can find a position that suits them.

### Taking up position

Each rugby squad or side — the group of players who make up a rugby team — is composed of 22 players. This includes the 15 who start the match plus the 7 reserves. The starting 15 take the pitch at the beginning of the match and the 7 reserves sit on the sideline in case of injury or tactical changes.

While most of the positions involve specialized skills, that doesn't mean players are stuck in the same position for the rest of their lives. Players have scope to move about, especially if their body shapes change with age.

The 15 players who start the game are divided into 8 forwards (also referred to as the *pack*), and 7 backs (commonly called the *backline*). The forwards are primarily responsible for winning the ball and the backs are charged with doing something positive when they get it. And old adage says the forwards decide who wins a match and the backs decide by how much.

Regardless of position, however, every rugby player must possess a basic set of skills. Each player must be able to tackle opposition ball-carriers, catch the ball, run with it, and pass it.

### Positions by the numbers

The 15 starters on a rugby side all wear specific numbers on their jerseys to designate their position. Even among English speakers, some of the names of the individual positions vary depending on where you are in the world, but the following terms are most generally recognized:

- **Loose-head prop (jersey number 1):** A big, strong player who is responsible for scrumming in the front row and lifting the jumpers in the line-out.
- **Hooker (jersey number 2):** This front rower actually hooks the ball with his foot at scrumtime, hence the name; plus he or she does the throwing at line-outs.
- **Tight-head prop (jersey number 3):** The rock upon which the scrum is built, he has to be the strongest and most technically proficient player in the pack.
- **Locks (jersey numbers 4 and 5):** Locks form the second row in the scrum and are normally used as line-out jumpers and restart takers because of their superior height and reliable hands. Some teams number their locks according to left or right, others by seniority, or simply preference of the players for a specific number.



- **Blindside flanker (jersey number 6):** This player must be powerful and make an impact in contact on offense and defense. He must have excellent ball-handling skills.
- **Openside flanker (jersey number 7):** This is usually the most dynamic and best defensive player on the team, responsible for making critical tackles, creating turnovers, and ranging all over the pitch.
- **Number 8 (jersey number 8):** The number 8 (or eightman) plays a crucial role on the team. This player directs and controls the scrum from the rear and is often a pivotal link between the forwards and the backs.
- **Scrumhalf (jersey number 9):** Also known as the halfback, this player must be compact and quick, with excellent passing skills and the ability to operate in tight quarters.
- **Flyhalf (jersey number 10):** This is the player who runs the show on the offense either by running, passing, or kicking the ball.
- **Wings (jersey numbers 11 and 14):** Two of the fastest players on the pitch, the wings must be able to kick and play good positional defense. Which side the two wings play on is usually decided by kicking ability and side-stepping preference.
- **Inside center (jersey number 12):** This is a physical player with quickness and power running the ball, and no fear when tackling.
- **Outside center (jersey number 13):** The outside center is a creative runner and ball-handler with very good speed and solid defensive skills.
- **Fullback (jersey number 15):** This is the backline general. This player must possess excellent tactical knowledge, have a strong leg for kicking, be an attack-oriented runner, and be the last line of defense.

## Reserves

Players who don't start the match but come on as replacements or substitutes are called reserves. The reserves sit near the field of play, ready to go on at any time. Coaches can replace players who are injured, make tactical changes to combat a threat posed by the opposition, or simply remove a player who is having a poor game. Each reserve has the same basic designated role as the players they replace. Wearing the jersey numbers 16 to 22, they are as follows:

- **Reserve hooker (jersey number 16):** The hooker replacement has to be able to come off the bench and hit the line-out jumpers with minimal warm-up.
- **Reserve prop (jersey number 17):** This player also needs to be able to cover for both the tight-head and loose-head props.
- **Reserve forward (jersey number 18):** This player can be used to cover either lock position.
- **Reserve forward (jersey number 19):** This player can provide backup for all three back-row forward positions (the flankers or number 8).
- **Reserve scrumhalf (jersey number 20):** This reserve is a specialized scrumhalf replacement.
- **Reserve back (jersey number 21):** This player can play either inside center or outside center position in midfield.



- **Reserve back (jersey number 22):** This second reserve back is used to provide backup for the wings or the fullback.

Of the seven players who sit on the reserve bench, three are specialist positions: the hooker, the prop, and the scrumhalf. For a scrum, an injured prop must be replaced by another suitably trained prop, not just by any player filling in, because of the particular technique, strength, and experience required to safely compete in the front row.

Officials are deeply concerned about the risk of serious injury to front-rowers if a scrum is incorrectly set, or injury to someone who doesn't have the ability to withstand the pressure coming through from the opposition. Safety on all levels has improved in recent years, with a greater emphasis on injury prevention.

Clever use of the reserve bench can often mean the difference between winning and losing a match, particularly if it's going right down to the wire. With the faster and fitter game of rugby being played these days, the reserve bench has become a vital part of every coach's arsenal.

Bringing on players from the reserve bench for tactical reasons is a recent rugby phenomenon. It has changed the way coaches select their 22-person squad and their strategy throughout. Fresh players are brought on as impact players, usually in the second half, to try to take advantage of a tiring opposition. This does not mean that a team gets an unfair advantage, as the opposition also has the chance to use fresh legs whenever required.

Being a reserve is a tough assignment in rugby, especially if the conditions are foul. Sitting on the sidelines while your teammates do battle is never easy and it even more difficult when you have to be ready to join the fray at any moment.

Each player on the reserve bench is there for a specific reason. Whenever you're in the reserves you have to stay focused on how the game is unfolding. It's important to watch the players you're likely to replace and see what's working and what's not against the opposition. The key is to be mentally switched-on and ready to play should the need arise.

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