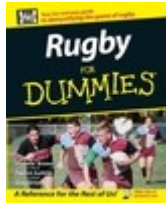




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The Tackle Law — Where Football Ends and Rugby Begins
Adapted From: [Rugby For Dummies](#)

When football emerged from the sport of rugby early in the 20th century, the biggest initial change was the concept of ending each play when the ball-carrier was tackled. In football, that's the signal for everyone to stop and head back to their respective huddles. In rugby, after the ball-carrier is tackled, the game continues and gets even more interesting. What happens next may seem disorganized, but if you know what to look for, it is actually well orchestrated and usually follows several different laws that govern the tackle situation, or what is known as the *breakdown*.

The tackle situation and continuity

For years, the International Rugby Board has been fiddling around with the tackle laws in an attempt to quicken the game. Concerned that matches were being slowed down by pile-ups of bodies fighting for the ball, the rule-makers have tried to simplify things. The result has been the assigning of responsibilities to both the tackler and the tackled player, which, if unfulfilled, draw penalties. Even though the changes have been somewhat effective, this is still the most contentious area of the game.

The Tackle Law is as follows: "A tackle occurs when a ball-carrier, in a standing position, is simultaneously held by one or more opponents, and is brought to the ground, and/or the ball touches the ground. That player is known as the tackled player. Any opponents of the tackled player who go to the ground are known as tacklers." The definition of "brought to the ground" includes a player who is on one knee, sitting on the ground, or on top of another player.

The tackled player

When players are tackled, they must immediately let go of the ball so that play can continue. It is illegal to lie on the ground and keep tight hold of the ball. Tackled players must either immediately pass the ball or release it by placing it on the ground in any direction (ideally, the ball should be placed backwards but that isn't always possible).

Once the tackled player has released the ball, he must attempt to roll away from the area, which means he can have no further involvement in play until he regains his feet. If the tackled player tries to play the ball in any way while still on the ground, he is liable to be penalized.

As a ball-carrier, your primary goal is to not lose possession of the ball for your team, whether you are on your feet or on the ground. Therefore, the best thing to do when being tackled is to manipulate your body position so that you fall with the tackler on the opposite side from where your teammates are. That way, when you release the ball back into play, your team will have first crack at securing possession of it and the opponents will have to step over both the tackler and you to grab the ball.



The tackler

When a player tackles an opponent and they both go to the ground, the tackler must immediately release the tackled player. Then he must immediately get to his feet or move away from the tackled player and roll away from the ball. Exactly how far away the tackler must roll is not defined, but he must not interfere with play until he's back on his feet. If he makes the mistake of grabbing the ball while he's still on the ground, he gets a penalty.

If by the time he gets to his feet a ruck is already formed, he cannot then play the ball because he is now subject to the Ruck Law. After a tackle, all other players must be on their feet when they play the ball. Players are considered "on their feet" if no other parts of their body are contacting the ground or players on the ground.

Tackling no-no's

In addition to the restrictions described above, the following rules also apply:

- A player cannot stop a tackled player from passing the ball.
- A player cannot stop a tackled player from releasing the ball, or from getting up and moving away from it.
- A player is not allowed to pull the ball from a tackled player before he has released it.
- A player may not fall on or over the tackled player.

What happens if the ball doesn't come out? Sometimes so many bodies are heaped together on the ground that neither the tackler nor the tackled player can move away. If the ball becomes unplayable at a tackle, the referee orders a scrum, with possession given to the team that was moving forward prior to stoppage. If no team was moving forward, the scrum feed goes to the attacking team. Most tackles turn into rucks soon afterwards.

So what's a ruck?

A ruck is formed when two or more players from each side are on their feet over the ball in physical contact with each other after a tackle, or when the ball is on the ground. The first players to arrive at a ruck have to bind to each other or the opposition. The players grab each other around the shoulders or waist, or whatever body part is most handy, and then try to step over the ball, thus driving the opposition back and away from the loose ball. But under no circumstances can they play the ball with their hands.

The ball is won from the ruck when players from one team successfully bind together and drive forward over the ball. Now the ball's once again available for the halfback, who then distributes it.