

Rules for Youth Tag Rugby

(up to under 16 years of age)

Updated by Nick Leonard

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Introduction

Tag Rugby is a fun and exciting form of non-contact rugby suitable for males and females of all ages and abilities. There are no scrums and line-outs and tackling is not allowed. The game was first pioneered in this country by Nick Leonard in 1991 as a way of introducing youngsters to the game of rugby. Since then Tag Rugby has had phenomenal growth in popularity and has now spread to countries throughout the world. Initially it was only really played by youngsters but increasingly so men and women of all ages and ability are taking up the game and Tag Rugby is now being recognised as not only a way of introducing young players to contact rugby but as a game in its own right.

This set of rules has been compiled by Nick Leonard and are based on his own experiences of almost twenty years of teaching, coaching, refereeing and playing Tag Rugby.

Why have different sets of rules for youth & adult players?

Experience has shown that to help provide an environment where players of all ages can gain maximum enjoyment and participation from Tag Rugby it is beneficial to have available different sets of rules for youth and adult players. These two sets of rules have been developed to best suite the varying physiological and psychological make up of players of different age groups.

The original set of rules for Tag Rugby (the Youth Rules) were written with the younger player in mind and were designed to facilitate a very fast, fluent and simply game which is appropriate for this age group. However, with an increasing number of adults now wishing to take up the game it was felt there was a need to develop a set of rules that allow for the creation of a more structured and tactical game that can be played at a more varied intensity, hence the introduction of the Adult Rules. The Adult Tag Rugby rules are largely based on the original touch rugby rules that have proved so popular in the southern hemisphere.

*Note: Due to the nature of the adult version of the rules it is **strongly recommended** they are not used with younger players (under 16's). Experience has shown that playing to these rules with such age groups will often lead to games that lack any real continuity and team work, resulting in young players soon becoming bored and frustrated due to their lack of participation and the stop start nature of the adult version of the game.*

Section A – Glossary of Terms

ADVANTAGE

If an infringement or offence has occurred, rather than blow the whistle and stop play immediately, the referee will allow play to proceed if it is to the territorial or tactical advantage of the team which has not committed an offence or infringement.

ATTACKING TEAM/ATTACKER

Is the team/player that has possession of the ball.

BALL AWAY

When a ball carrier is tagged simultaneously in the act of passing and the referee has ruled in favour of the attacking team and not counted this as a proper tag. In this situation the referee should call “BALL AWAY, PLAY ON”.

BALL CARRIER

Is a member of the attacking team who has possession of the ball.

CAPTAIN

The captain is a player nominated by the team. Only the captain is entitled to consult the referee during the match.

CHANGEOVER

Is the surrendering of the ball to the opposition; the game restarts with a *tap & pass* to the team now in possession of the ball.

DEAD BALL LINE

A line parallel to and five metres (5m) behind the *try-line* defining the end of the *In-Goal Area*.

DEFENDING TEAM/DEFENDER

Is the team/player without possession of the ball.

DEFENSIVE LINE

This is an imaginary line across the ground from one *touch-line* to the other, parallel to the *try-line*. The position of this line is seven metres (7m) back

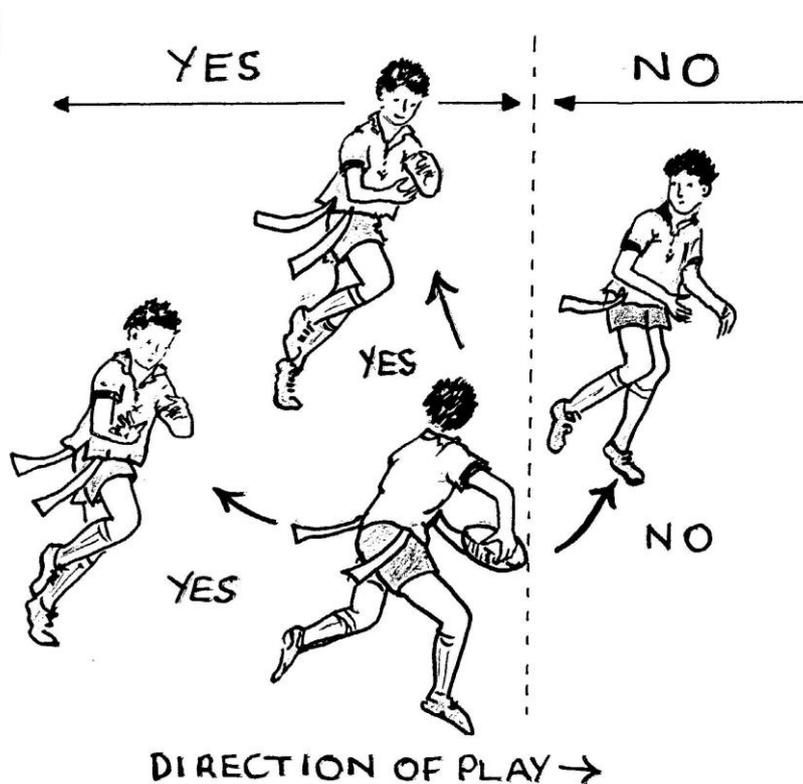
from a *tap & pass*. All defenders should retire back behind this line to be on-side when play restarts.

FORWARD PASS

Where the ball is passed forwards towards an opponent's *try-line*. This is an illegal pass in Tag Rugby and is penalised by awarding a *tap & pass* to the non-offending team.

Note: A pass directly sideways is allowed.

THE NO FORWARD PASS RULE



GROUNDING THE BALL

A player grounds the ball by holding the ball and touching the ground with it in the *in-goal area*. 'Holding' means holding in the hand or hands, or in the arm or arms.

IN-GOAL AREA

The area between the *try-line* and the *dead ball line*, it includes the *try-line* but not the *touch-lines* or the *dead ball line*.

Note: If the pitch has no dead ball line markings then the in-goal area can extend an estimated five metres (5m) back from the try-line. The referee

should encourage an attacking player in possession of the ball to touch the ball on the ground to score a try once they have crossed the try-line.

KNOCK-ON

When a player attempting to catch the ball fumbles it with the hand or arm and knocks it forward to the ground in the direction of the opponents' *try-line*.



MARK

The position on the pitch where a *tap & pass* is awarded.

OFF-SIDE

A defending player who, when a *tag* has occurred, has not retired towards their own *try-line* until they are behind an imaginary line which goes through the ball and across the pitch which is the *off-side* line.

OUT OF PLAY

This happens when the ball or the *ball carrier* has touched the *touch-line*, *touch-in-goal line*, or the *dead ball line* or anything or anyone on or beyond these lines.

PENALISE

Is to award a *tap & pass* against an offending player or team.

PENALTY

This is awarded against a player or team that has committed an offence and there has been no advantage gained by the non-offending team. Play is

restarted with a *tap & pass* being awarded to the non-offending team at the place the offence was committed.

PENALTY TRY

This is awarded if a player would have scored a *try* but for foul play by an opponent.

PHANTOM TAG

When a defender calls "TAG" without physically removing a tag. This is penalised by awarding a *tap & pass* to the non-offending team.

SEVEN-METRE (7M) LINE

These lines run from one *touch-line* to the other and are seven metres (7m) from each side of the half-way line.

SPINNING

When the ball carrier deliberately rotates their body around in a pirouette type movement to avoid being tagged by a defender. This is an illegal movement in Tag Rugby and is penalised by awarding a *tap & pass* to the non-offending team.

'TACKLE' (TAG)

A 'tackle' (tag) is simply the removal by a defender of one of the two tags (ribbons) from the ball carrier.

TAG

Either refers to one of the two tags (ribbons) attached to a player's Tag belt or Tag shorts, or to a 'tackle' being made when a defender removes one of the tags (ribbons) from the ball carrier.

TAG COUNT

For every time a player is tagged whilst in possession of the ball the team's *Tag Count* increases i.e. from Tag 1, Tag 2, etc. The referee should normally call out the *Tag Count* after each tag e.g. "TAG ONE....PASS", "TAG TWO...PASS" etc.

TAGGER

The defender who has removed the tag (ribbon) from the ball carrier is called the *tagger*.

TAP & PASS

A *tap & pass* is used to start the game from the centre of the half-way or restart play at the place the ball went out of play or an infringement or *changeover* took place.

The ball may be placed on the ground or held in the hand and on the instruction "PLAY" by the referee, **and not before**, the attacker must deliberately touch the ball with the foot whilst it is in the hands or on the ground and pass the ball. The attacker must tap and pass the ball they are not allowed to tap it and run with the ball themselves.

At a *tap & pass* the opposition players must retire back seven metres (7m) towards their own *try-line*, or until they have reached their own *try-line* if this is nearer. Defenders are not allowed to move forward until the actual pass has been made.

TOUCH-LINE

The line that marks the lateral edge of the pitch.

TRY

This is the only method of scoring in Tag Rugby; a *try* is scored when the ball is *grounded* by an attacker on or over the *try-line* but before the *dead ball line*. A *try* is worth one (1) point in Tag Rugby however, to encourage greater team work when playing in mixed games a try is worth two (2) points if scored by a female.

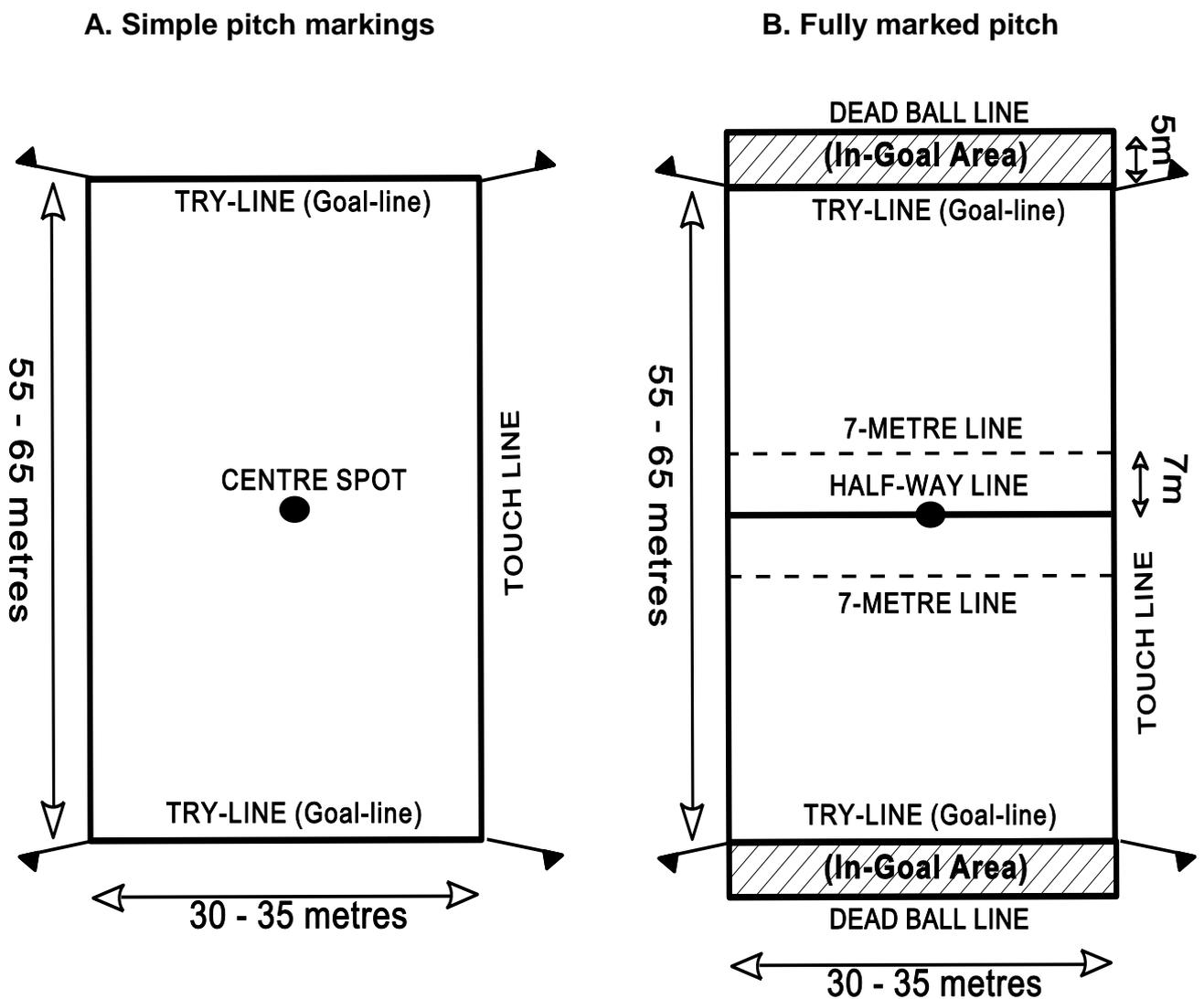
Note: For safety, when playing on hard surfaces or in restricted areas, a try can be scored by the ball carrier crossing the vertical plane of the try-line and holding the ball above their head and shouting "TRY". They do not have to touch the ball on the floor.

TRY-LINE (GOAL-LINE)

The horizontal line at either end of the pitch, over or on which a *try* is scored.

Section B – The Playing Area for Youth Tag Rugby

For recreational games of Tag Rugby it is by no means essential to have available a fully marked pitch, as shown in diagram B below. Such games can easily be played on a pitch marked out as a simple rectangle showing only the location of the two *touch-lines* and *try-lines*, as in diagram A.



Note: One large adult step is roughly equal to one metre. A Tag Rugby pitch is more or less half the size of a normal rugby pitch, playing across the pitch, using the touch-lines on the rugby pitch as the try-lines for a Tag Rugby match.

Section C - The Object of the Game

The object of the game is to score tries. This is achieved by placing the ball with downward pressure on, or behind, the opponents' *try-line*. The player in possession of the ball (*attacker*) may run or pass the ball to achieve this but is not allowed to kick it. The ball may only be passed either sideways or backwards and not forwards to the opponents' *try-line*. It is the object of the team without the ball (*defensive team*) to prevent progress of the attacking team by removing a tag (ribbon) from the ball carrier. The attacking team have four (4) "tags" or "plays" to score. If a fifth (5th) tag is made a *changeover* occurs and the defending team is given possession of the ball and then becomes the attacking team.

Section D – A Quick 20 Step Guide to the Youth Rules

(up to 16 years of age)

1. **How many players in a team?** - There is a maximum of seven (7) players per team on the field at any one time. In mixed games there must be a minimum of three (3) players of the opposite sex (subject to local rules) on the pitch at all times. Rolling subs are allowed at any time during the game but in mixed games the appropriate number of each sex must be maintained. Squads are normally made up of twelve (12) players (subject to local rules).
2. **How long is a match?** - This is subject to local rules but the normal duration of a single game is two halves of twenty (20) minutes each, with a five (5) minute interval for half time. For festival type events games normally consist of two seven (7) minute halves with one (1) minute for half time, or simply ten (10) minutes one way with no half time.
3. **Players clothing** - All players wear either a Tag Rugby belt or, Official Tag Rugby match shorts. **Shirts should be tucked in at all times.** The tags (ribbons) must be properly positioned on either side of the hips. No player can participate in the game without both tags being properly in place. Players are not allowed to wear anything that might prove dangerous to other players, e.g. any jewellery or watches.

4. **What about the coloured tags (ribbons)?** - The referee should normally issue each team with seven (7) sets of identical tags (identical except for their colour) prior to the commencement of the match. If a player is replaced during the game he/she gives his/her tags to the new player coming on. If using Tag belts rather than Tag shorts, a replacement is allowed to wear the velcro belt itself but must not have any tags attached to it until he/she is given them by the player he/she is replacing. A team may not use any other tags during the game.

Note: Playing to this rule means a team can never have more than seven players involved in the game at any one time.

5. **How do players score in Tag Rugby?** - There is only one way of scoring in Tag Rugby and that is by scoring tries. A *try* is awarded to the attacking team when the ball is placed with downward pressure on, or behind, the opponents' *try-line*. A *try* is worth one (1) point but to encourage more team play in mixed games a *try* is worth two (2) points if scored by a female.

Note: For safety, when playing on hard surfaces or in restricted areas, a try is scored simply when the ball carrier crosses the vertical plane of the try-line, they do not have to touch the ball on the floor.

6. **Are there any scrums or line-outs?** - There are no scrums or line-outs in Tag Rugby.

7. **Can you bash into other players?** - There is strictly **NO CONTACT** allowed between players, the only 'contact' allowed between the two teams is the removal of a tag from the Tag belt/Tag shorts of the ball carrier. Both attackers and defenders have a responsibility to avoid each other at **ALL** times. The ball carrier is not allowed to run directly into defenders and defenders are not allowed to block the progress of the ball carrier. No hand-offs, or using your hand, elbow or ball to block or shield your tags in any way is allowed. No pulling of clothing or pulling/knocking the ball out of the ball carrier's hand is permitted. Any player that initiates contact should be penalised and the player(s) concerned reminded of the rules.

Remember:

“Run at spaces not faces”

8. **How do you ‘tackle’ (*tag*) in Tag Rugby?** - Only the ball carrier can be ‘tackled’ (tagged). A ‘tackle’ (*tag*) is simply the removal by a defender of one of the two tags (ribbons) from the ball carrier. The defender then holds the tag above his/her head and shouts “TAG” for all to hear.
Note: If playing with a referee, it is helpful at this stage if the referee shouts “TAG ONE,...PASS”, TAG TWO,...PASS” etc as the tags are completed.
9. **What must the ball carrier (attacker) do after being tagged?** – In Youth Tag Rugby there is no actual stoppage in play when a *tag* is made, instead the player in possession of the ball, the ball carrier, must stop running and pass immediately. The ball carrier is allowed a maximum of three (3) steps and three (3) seconds to pass the ball. If they fail to do this then a *tap & pass* is awarded to the non-offending team at the place of the infringement.
10. **What must the *tagger* do after making a *tag*?** –The *tagger*, and other defenders, must back off at least one metre (1m) from the ball carrier (attacker), allowing space for the ball carrier to pass. After a *tag* has occurred and the attacker has passed the ball, both the attacker and the *tagger* are momentarily out of the game. The *tagger* can take no further part until they have, in a sporting manner, handed back the tag (ribbon) to the attacker (not thrown it on the floor) and the attacker, no further part until they have replaced their tag (ribbon) back on their Tag belt/Tag shorts.
11. **What is the rule about carrying the ball in two hands?** - To encourage more passing and to avoid the ball carrier deliberately, or instinctively, trying to protect his/her tags (ribbons), the ball carrier **MUST**, when they are within three metres (3m) of defenders, **HOLD THE BALL IN TWO HANDS**. If the ball carrier fails to do this it is helpful if the referee shouts a warning, “TWO HANDS”, if this is ignored the player should be penalised by awarding a *tap & pass* to the non offending team.

12. **What is a *tap & pass*?** - A *tap & pass* is used to start the game or restart it at the place the ball went out of play or an infringement or *changeover* took place. The ball may be placed on the ground or held in the hand and on the instruction “PLAY” by the referee, **and not before**, the attacker must tap the ball with the foot, or lower leg, and pass the ball. At a *tap & pass* the opposition players must retire back seven metres (7m) towards their own *try-line*, or until they have reached their own *try-line* if this is nearer. Defenders are not allowed to move forward until the actual pass has been made.

Note: The referee should normally allow about five (5) seconds for defenders to get back before saying “PLAY”. Defenders are not allowed to interfere with play until they have retired the required seven metres (7m).

13. **How quickly can a *tap & pass* be taken?** - A *tap & pass* **cannot** be taken quickly but only after the referee has given the defensive team time (about five (5) seconds) to retire the required seven metres (7m) and given the instruction “PLAY”. Play must restart with a pass, players are not allowed to tap the ball and run themselves.

14. **What is *off-side*?** – Players can only ever be *off-side* immediately after a ‘tackle’ (*tag*) has been made and it is essentially only the defending players who can be penalised for being *off-side*. In simple terms, once a *tag* has been made there is an imaginary *off-side* line that runs through the ball and across the pitch, (except for the actual *tagger* for whom it is one metre (1m) further back as described in Rule 10 above). When a *tag* has been made all defenders must attempt to retire towards their own *try-line* until they are behind the ball (*off-side* line). Defenders in front of the ball at a *tag*, and therefore *off-side*, are not allowed to interfere with play in any way e.g. by blocking or intercepting the pass, marking up support players or immediately tagging the receiver of the pass.

Note: There is no off-side in open play.

15. **When should players be penalised for being *off-side*?** - Players should only ever be penalised for *off-side* if they are **Off-SIDE AND INTERFERING WITH PLAY IMMEDIATELY AFTER A TAG**. If players find themselves in an *off-side* position at a *tag* they must make every effort

to get back on side; but if they are in no way interfering with play, then they should **not** be penalised and play should be allowed to continue. Once the ball carrier has passed the ball away after being tagged and play has continued then this is regarded as Open Play and there is no longer an *off-side* line in existence. Players who are *off-side* are temporarily out of the game.

Off-side is penalised by awarding a *tap & go* to the non-offending team.

16. **What is a *Knock-on*?** - A *knock-on* occurs when a player attempting to catch the ball fumbles it and knocks it forward and onto the ground in the direction of the opponents' *try-line*.

A *Knock-on* is penalised by awarding a *tap & pass* to the non-offending team.

17. **What happens when somebody does something wrong or a *try* has been scored?** - Whenever the Tag Rugby rules are broken, a *tap & pass* is awarded to the non-offending team at the place the infringement took place and the number of tags (*Tag Count*) starts back to zero. If the infringement took place over the *try-line*, or within five metres (5m) of it, the *tap & pass* is awarded five metres (5m) out from the *try-line* to create some space. When a *try* has been scored the non-scoring team then restart play in the centre of the pitch with a *tap & pass*.

18. **What happens if an attacking player is tagged just before scoring?** If an attacking player is tagged **before** they have actually grounded the ball for a *try* then a *try* should **NOT** be awarded. Instead it will count as a *tag* and the game will restart with a *tap & pass* to the attacking team, five metres (5m) out from the *try-line*. If this is the 5th *tag* then a *changeover* should occur.

Note: When tagged near, or over, the try-line the attacking player still has the option of passing the ball to a team mate to score provided that this is done within 3 seconds.

19. **When should you play on after a mistake or an infringement has taken place?** - Except where safety is an issue, referees should play advantage wherever possible and allow the game to flow.

20. **Things to Avoid** - In the interest of safety and fair play players need to abide by the following rules:

- **No kicking** - No kicking is allowed in Tag Rugby.
- **No diving to score or diving to the floor to secure a ball which has gone to ground** - instead players must always remain on their feet when scoring or playing the ball off the floor.
- **No pulling or knocking the ball out of the ball carriers hands** – at any time.
- **No spinning/jumping** – ball carriers are not allowed to deliberately spin around or jump to avoid being tagged.
- **No player can participate in the game without both tags (ribbons) being properly in place** - one on either side of the hip.

If any of these rules are broken then a *tap & pass* is awarded to the non offending team.

Note: When dealing with beginners or players of low ability then, at the discretion of those in charge, players can be given longer than three (3) seconds to pass the ball after being tagged and/or the number of the *tags (Tag Count)* can be increased to more than five (5) before a *changeover* of possession is awarded. Similarly, with more able players, or when playing in a restricted area, the *Tag Count* can be reduced to less than five (5).

Code of conduct

All players and coaches will be expected to abide by the rules of the match/ tournament and decisions made by the officials and referees. They will be expected to play fairly and demonstrate good sportsmanship both on and off the pitch. In the event of misconduct and/or repeated and deliberate breaking of the rules or dangerous play, then the referee/tournament officials shall, at their discretion issue players with a yellow (sin binned) or red (sent off) card.

Section E – The Rules in More Detail

RULE 1 - Teams/Clothing

- 1.1 There is a maximum of seven (7) players per team on the field at any one time. In mixed games there must be a minimum of three (3) players of the opposite sex (subject to local rules) on the pitch at all times. Rolling subs are allowed at any time during the game but in mixed games the appropriate number of each sex must be maintained. Squads are normally made up of twelve (12) players (subject to local rules).
- 1.2 At festival type events there must be no mixing of any 'A' and 'B' squads i.e. a player must play for one team or the other throughout the festival. However, if in the case a large number of genuine injuries to one squad, the event organiser will make a decision about any players changing squads.
- 1.3 **Players clothing** - All players wear either a Tag Rugby belt or, official Tag Rugby match shorts. **Shirts should be tucked in at all times.** The Tags (ribbons) must be properly positioned on either side of the hips. No player can participate in the game without both Tags being properly in place.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

Note: Players are not allowed to wear anything that might prove dangerous to other players, e.g. any jewellery & watches. Players are permitted to wear cycling shorts/compression shorts etc, or even tracksuit bottoms, under their Official Tag Rugby Match shorts providing that, in the referees' opinion, the item worn does not restrict the opposition executing a tag on that player.

- 1.4 The referee should only issue each team with seven (7) sets of identical tags (identical except for their colour) prior to the commencement of the match. If a player is replaced during the game he/she gives his/her tags to the new player coming on. If using Tag belts rather than Tag shorts, a replacement is allowed to wear the velcro belt itself but must not have

any tags attached to it until he/she is given them by the player he/she is replacing. A team may not use any other tags during the game.

Note: Playing to this rule means a team can never have more than seven players involved in the game at any one time.

- 1.5 The colour of the tags worn by a team should not be the same colour as the shorts the players of that team are wearing, or be so similar that in the referees' opinion, that team/player is gaining an unfair advantage.
- 1.6 All tags must be returned to the referee at the end of the game.
- 1.7 Rolling substitutions/replacements are allowed at any time during the game but in mixed games, the appropriate number of each sex must be maintained. The replaced player should leave the field of play before the replacement can participate in the game. All replacements during the game should be from the same side of the field.
- 1.8 Players are not allowed to wear anything that might prove dangerous to other players, e.g. any jewellery & watches. If jewellery cannot be removed, e.g. rings, then they must be completely covered by tape with no sharp or raised edges exposed.
Note: For safety, any excess part of the Tag belt should be tucked away so that this cannot be pulled by mistake.
- 1.9 This is subject to local rules but footwear should be suitable for the weather and surface conditions that prevail. The preferred and recommended footwear on grass is boots with moulded studs or blades, or trainers if ground conditions are dry and firm.
- 1.10 Headgear, headscarfs, baseball caps, etc. are permitted as long as they do not present a threat to the safety of either the player wearing the head gear or any other player on the pitch.
- 1.11 Players may not wear spectacles or sunglasses. Contact lenses or sports goggles are permitted.

- 1.12 For refereeing purposes, the two teams should wear contrasting coloured shirts. If, in the referees' opinion, there is a clash of colours then it is normally the home team that should change their colour.

RULE 2 - Duration of Play/Start of the Game

- 2.1 This is subject to local rules but the normal duration of a single game is two halves of twenty (20) minutes each, with a five (5) minute interval for half time, at half time teams change ends.

The duration of games at festival type events will vary depending on the size and nature of the event and time available. As a guideline games normally consist of two (2) halves of seven (7) minutes duration with an interval of one (1) minute for half time. If time available is an issue, then games can be ten (10) minutes one way with no half time.

- 2.2 The captain who wins the toss can choose either, which direction his/her team will play or, possession at the start of the game. The captain who lost the toss can then choose the remaining option.

- 2.3 The game starts with a *tap & pass* (see Rule 6) at the centre of the half-way line.

RULE 3 - Scoring

- 3.1 There is only one way of scoring in Tag Rugby and that is by scoring tries. A *try* is awarded to the attacking team when they *ground the ball* on, or behind, the *try-line* in the *in goal area*. If the ball is grounded on the *touch-in-goal line* or the *dead ball line*, then a *try* should **NOT** be awarded and the game will restart with a *tap & pass* to the defensive team, five metres (5m) out from the *try-line*.

Note: For safety, when playing on hard surfaces or in restricted areas, a try is scored simply when the ball carrier crosses the vertical plane of the try-line, they do not have to touch the ball on the floor.

- 3.2 One point is awarded for a *try*. However, to encourage more team play in mixed games if a female scores a *try* then it is worth two (2) points. However, it **must** be a female who actually carries the ball over the *try-line* for the two (2) points to be awarded. A male player cannot pass to a

female player **after** crossing the *try-line*, nor can he run back into the field of play to pass to a female player. If this does occur and a *try* is scored, only one (1) point will be awarded for the *try*.

- 3.3 For safety, there is no diving or sliding to score a *try*; players must remain on their feet to score.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

Note: If a player grounds the ball while on their knees, the try should be allowed but, afterwards, all players should be reminded they should stay on their feet when scoring.

- 3.4 After a *try* has been scored, the opponents of the team that scored restart play with a *tap & pass* in the centre of the *half-way line*.

- 3.5 If an attacking player is tagged **before** they have actually grounded the ball for a *try* then a *try* should **NOT** be awarded. Instead it will count as a *tag* and the game will restart with a *tap & pass* to the attacking team, five metres (5m) out from the *try-line*. If this is the 5th *tag* then a *changeover* should occur.

Note: When tagged near, or over, the try-line the attacking player still has the option of passing the ball to a team mate to score, provided that this is done within 3 seconds.

- 3.6 **Penalty Try** – A *try* will be awarded if a *try* would probably have been scored but for foul play by an opponent. If the *try* was probably going to be scored by a female, then this will be worth two (2) points.

RULE 4 - Playing the Game

- 4.1 **No Contact Rule** - There is strictly **NO CONTACT** allowed between players. The only 'contact' allowed between the two teams is the removal of a tag from the Tag belt/Tag shorts of the ball carrier. Both attackers and defenders have a responsibility to avoid each other at **ALL** times. The ball carrier is not allowed to run directly into defenders and defenders are not allowed to block the progress of the ball carrier. No

hand-offs, or using your hand, elbow or ball to block or shield your tags in any way is allowed. No pulling of clothing or pulling/knocking the ball out of the ball carrier's hand is permitted. Any player that initiates contact should be penalised and the player(s) concerned reminded of the rules.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

Remember:

“Run at spaces not faces”

- 4.3 Defenders should tag from the side and not reach across the attacker's body to remove a tag. A defender must, in the referee's opinion, be attempting to remove a tag and not be deliberately impeding the progress of the ball carrier, or any other attacking player, with any part of his/her body or he/she risks being penalised. Any player that initiates contact should be penalised.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

- 4.4 **Ball in Two Hands Rule-** If the ball carrier holds the ball in just one hand or under one arm when close to defenders, there is every likelihood that his/her 'free hand' will in some way, either deliberately, or instinctively, interfere, block or fend off a defender attempting to effect a *tag*. This often leads to frustration on behalf of defenders and ultimately to unnecessary contact between players. To avoid this occurring, and at the same time encourage more passing, in Tag Rugby **THE BALL CARRIER MUST HOLD THE BALL IN TWO HANDS WHEN THEY ARE WITHIN THREE METRES (3m) OF DEFENDERS.** Where possible, referees are encouraged to reinforce this rule by shouting out "TWO HANDS" when necessary, but should penalise the ball carrier if he/she ignores this warning, or has used their free hand to interfere, block or fend off a defender in anyway.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

Note: Experience has shown that although carrying the ball in two hands may at first feel quite alien to some players, once players have got use to

this rule it soon becomes second nature to them when playing Tag Rugby and they rarely violate it.

Passing the ball with one hand is permitted as long as the other hand is in no way protecting the player from being tagged.

It is not a prerequisite for referees to warn a player for carrying the ball in one hand before they can penalise them.

4.5 No forward passes or knock-ons are allowed.

Penalty: Tap & pass

RULE 5 - The 'Tackle' (Tag) and Tag Count

5.1 Only the player with the ball can be tagged and a 'tackle' (*tag*) is simply the removal of one of the two tags (ribbons) from the ball carrier. Ball carriers can run or dodge defenders attempting to make a tag, but cannot fend them off or guard or shield their tags in any way. This includes using the ball or their elbows.

Note: Where conditions allow, defenders are permitted to dive to remove a tag but must not make contact with any other player in doing so. However, if playing indoors or on hard or uneven surfaces, or where, in the opinion of those in charge, diving would be a safety issue, then defenders must remain on their feet to execute a tag.

5.2 Once a defender has removed a tag he/she holds the tag above his/her head and shouts "TAG" for all to hear. The referee will then confirm a legitimate tag has taken place by also shouting "TAG", followed by the number of tags that team have used up at that stage, the *tag count*, e.g. "TAG ONE...PASS", "TAG TWO...PASS" etc.

5.3 **What must the ball carrier (attacker) do after being tagged?** – In Youth Tag Rugby there is no actual stoppage in play when a *tag* is made, instead the player in possession of the ball, the ball carrier, must stop running and pass immediately. The ball carrier is allowed a maximum of three (3) steps and three (3) seconds to pass the ball. If they fail to do this then a *tap & pass* is awarded to the non-offending

team at the place the infringement. The referee can assist players in this situation by calling “TAG ONE PASS”, “TAG TWO PASS” etc.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

Note: The ball carrier can pass in the act of stopping

5.4 **What must the *tagger* do after making a *tag*?** – The *tagger*, and other defenders, must back off at least one metre (1m) from the ball carrier (attacker), allowing space for the ball carrier to pass. After a *tag* has occurred and the attacker has passed the ball, both the attacker and the *tagger* are momentarily out of the game. The *tagger* can take no further part until they have, in a sporting manner, handed back the tag (ribbon) to the attacker (not thrown it on the floor) and the attacker, no further part until they have replaced their tag (ribbon) back on their Tag belt/Tag shorts.

5.5 The attacking team have four (4) consecutive ‘tags’ or ‘plays’ to score a *try*. If a fifth (5th) tag is made, a *changeover* occurs and the opposition are awarded a *tap & pass* at the place the fifth (5th) tag took place.

Note: When dealing with beginners or players of low ability then, at the discretion of those in charge, players can be given longer than three (3) seconds to pass the ball after being tagged and/or the number of the tags (Tag Count) can be increased to more than five (5) before a changeover of possession is awarded. Similarly, with more able players, or when playing in a restricted area, the Tag Count can be reduced to less than five (5).

5.6 Whenever a *tap & pass* is awarded the *tag count* will normally start back to zero (see rule 3.5 for an exception to this). This is a good incentive for the team not in possession of the ball not to deliberately infringe.

5.7 If the ball carrier is tagged simultaneously in the act of passing, i.e. the ball is simultaneously leaving the ball carrier’s hands the moment he/she is tagged, the referee will always rule in favour of the attacking team and not count this as one of the tags towards the *tag count* tally. The referee

should communicate this decision to players by calling “BALL AWAY, PLAY ON”.

5.8 A *try* will not be awarded if the attacking player in possession of the ball is tagged **before** they have actually grounded the ball for a *try* (see Rule 3.5 for further details).

5.9 For a tag to be legal, the ball must still be in the hands of the ball carrier at the moment the tag is made. If a defender **deliberately** removes a tag from the ball carrier after he/she has passed the ball, or before the player has received the ball, the defender will be deemed to have made an illegal tag. In both instances the referee should, if the non-offending team gain no advantage, award a *tap & pass* to the non-offending team at the place the offence occurred.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

5.10 If a defender calls “TAG” without physically removing a tag (a ‘*phantom tag*’) then the attacking team shall be awarded a *tap & pass* if the attacking team have gained no advantage.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

5.11 For safety, if the ball carrier accidentally falls or slips to the ground while in possession of the ball (this includes if the knee or elbow touches the ground) and a defender is within tagging distance, a tag will be deemed to have been made. In this situation the referee should stop the game immediately and restart it with a *tap & pass* to the team in possession of the ball, adding a tag to that teams’ *tag count* tally. If this is the 5th *tag* then a *changeover* should occur.

5.12 No player can participate in the game without both tags being correctly in place.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

Note: However in the spirit of the game, if the referee believes a tag has dropped off the ball carriers Tag belt/Tag shorts purely by accident and a defender is within tagging distance, the referee can stop the game and

award a tap & pass to the ball carriers team, counting this as one of the tags towards their tag count tally. The place where this tap & pass is taken is at the discretion of the referee, but is normally where the tag originally dropped off, or where, in the view of the referee, the ball carrier would probably have been tagged by a defender if the tag was properly in place. If this is the 5th tag in the tag count then the referee should award a changeover of possession.

RULE 6 – Tap & pass

- 6.1 A *tap & pass* is used to start the game or restart it at the place the ball went out of play or an infringement or *changeover* took place. The place at which the *tap & pass* is awarded is called the *mark*. Any player may take a *tap & pass* awarded to their team. The ball may be placed on the ground or held in the hand and on the instruction “PLAY” by the referee, **and not before**, the attacker must tap the ball with the foot, or lower leg, and pass the ball. Tapping the ball with the knee is not allowed and the referee should stop play and request the *tap & pass* be retaken in the proper manner.

Note: If playing Tag Rugby without a referee the instruction “PLAY” can be given by the opposition captain.

- 6.2 At a *tap & pass*, the defending team must retire back seven metres (7m) towards their own *try-line* to an imaginary line called the *defensive line*, or until they have reached their own *try-line* if this is nearer. Defending players are not allowed to move forward from this *defensive line* until the attacking player has actually passed the ball.

Penalty: *Tap & pass* (to be taken at the *defensive line*)

- 6.3 A *tap & pass* **cannot** be taken quickly but only after the referee has given the defensive team time (about five (5) seconds) to retire the required seven metres (7m) and given the instruction “PLAY”. Play must restart with the attacking player passing the ball, players are not allowed to tap the ball and run themselves. If they do the referee should stop play and request the *tap & pass* be retaken in the proper manner.

- 6.4 The referee will usually indicate to defensive players precisely how far back they should retire at a *tap & pass* by standing on the *defensive line* and calling "ON ME". All defensive players should take up a position in line with the referee, or further back from the referee towards their own *try-line*, or they risk being penalised.
- 6.5 Referees should normally only allow just enough time (about five (5) seconds) for the defensive team to quickly get back to the *defensive line* and should not delay restarting play for too long. If, defensive players are slow to get back, the referee can, at his/her discretion, still choose to restart play. When play restarts, any defensive player who has yet to retire the required seven metres (7m) must not take any further part in the game until he/she has done so.
- Penalty:** *Tap & pass* (to be taken at the *defensive line*)
- 6.6 If a defending player, who has not retired back the required seven metres (7m), interferes with play, the referee should award a *tap & pass* to the non-offending team if the attacking team gain no advantage. This *tap & pass* is awarded at the *defensive line* the defending players should have retired to.
- Penalty:** *Tap & pass* (to be taken at the *defensive line*)
- 6.7 For safety reasons, at a *tap & pass* the receiver of the pass must not start from more than two meters (2m) back from the *mark* to avoid the potentially dangerous 'crash ball' move.
- 6.8 If an infringement takes place over the *try-line*, or within five metres (5m) of it, a *tap & pass* is awarded five metres (5m) out from the *try-line* to create some space.
- 6.9 If a *tap & pass* is awarded but the offending team is guilty of further misconduct e.g. disputing the referee's decision, the referee cautions or orders off the guilty player and advances the *mark* of the *tap & pass* seven metres (7m) forward. Further misconduct can result in the referee advancing the *mark* a further seven metres (7m).

RULE 7 – Off-side

7.1 **What is *off-side*?** – Players can only ever be *off-side* immediately after a ‘tackle’ (*tag*) has been made and it is essentially only the defending players who can be penalised for being *off-side*. In simple terms, once a *tag* has been made there is an imaginary *off-side* line that runs through the ball and across the pitch, (except for the actual *tagger* for whom it is one metre (1m) further back as described in Rule 5.4). When a *tag* has been made, all defenders must attempt to retire towards their own *try-line* until they are behind the ball (the *off-side* line). Those defenders who are in front of the ball at a *tag*, and therefore *off-side*, are not allowed to interfere with play in any way e.g. by blocking or intercepting the pass, marking up support players or immediately tagging the receiver of the pass.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

Note: There is no off-side in open play.

7.2 **When should players be penalised for being *off-side*?** - Players should only ever be penalised for *off-side* if they are ***Off-SIDE AND INTERFERING WITH PLAY IMMEDIATELY AFTER A TAG***. If players find themselves in an *off-side* position at a *tag* they must make every effort to get back on side; but if they are in no way interfering with play then they should **not** be penalised and play should be allowed to continue. Players who are *off-side* are temporarily out of the game.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

7.3 To assist referees, players who find themselves accidentally *off-side* should raise both hands above their head to indicate to the referee that they have no intention of trying to interfere with play.

7.4 Once the ball carrier has passed the ball away after being tagged and play has continued then this is regarded as Open Play and there is no longer an *off-side* line in existence. In other words the *off-side* line is only really in existence for a few seconds immediately after a *tag* has been

made and defending players can only ever be penalised for being *off-side* during this short period of time.

- 7.5 **Legal interception** – A defending player who is in an **on-side** position (behind the ball) at a *tag* is permitted to run forward and intercept a pass made by the attacking player who was tagged, providing they were still in an on-side position when the actual pass is made.

RULE 8 – Ball out of Play

- 8.1 If the ball or the ball carrier touches the *touch-line* or anything or anyone on or beyond the *touch-line*, the ball is out of play and a *tap & pass* is awarded to the team who was not in last possession of the ball or last touched the ball before it went into touch. This *tap & pass* should be taken five metres (5m) in from the *touch-line* to create some space.
- 8.2 If the ball or the ball carrier touches the corner post, the *touch-in-goal line*, or the *dead ball line* or the ground beyond these lines, the ball becomes dead. If the ball was carried into the *in-goal area* by the attacking team, a *tap & pass* is awarded to the defending team. If the ball was carried into the *in-goal-area* by a defender, the attacking team are awarded a *tap & pass*. In both cases, the *tap & pass* should be taken in the centre of the pitch, five metres (5m) out from the *try-line*.

RULE 9 - Advantage

- 9.1 Except where safety is an issue, advantage should be played wherever possible to allow the game to flow.
- 9.2 The advantage rule states that if an infringement has occurred, rather than blow the whistle and stop play immediately, the referee will allow play to proceed if it is to the territorial or tactical advantage of the team which has not committed an offence or infringement. The referee should communicate this to the players verbally by calling out “PLAY ADVANTAGE” and physically, by giving the correct referee’s hand signal for advantage (an arm outstretched, waist high, pointing towards the non-offending team).

However, if the non-offending team does not in fact gain an advantage, the referee shall whistle and bring play back to the place of the original infringement and award a *tap & pass* to the non-offending team.

RULE 10 - Things to Avoid

10.1 **No Contact** – strictly no contact or grabbing a player's clothing is allowed. Both attackers and defenders have a responsibility to avoid each other at all times. The only 'contact' allowed between the two teams is the removal of a tag from the Tag belt/Tag shorts of the ball carrier.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

10.2 **No Kicking** – no kicking is allowed in Youth Tag Rugby

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

10.3 **No Hand-offs** - no hand-offs on the body or face or to swipe a defender's hand away to stop him/her taking your tags. This includes using the ball or elbows to fend off or block defenders.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

10.4 **No Diving to score or diving to secure a ball which has gone to ground** – instead players must remain on their feet at all times when playing the ball.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

10.5 **No Spinning/Jumping** - ball carriers are not allowed to deliberately rotate their body around in a pirouette type movement or jump up to avoid being tagged by a defender.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

10.6 **No Deliberate Barging into Defenders** - for safety, attackers and defenders should attempt to avoid contact with each other at all times.

Penalty: *Tap & pass*

- 10.7 **No Pulling or Knocking the Ball out of the Ball Carrier's Hands** - at any time.
Penalty: *Tap & pass*
- 10.8 **No Player** can participate in the game without both tags being correctly in place.
Penalty: *Tap & pass*
- 10.9 **No Carrying the Ball Under One Arm** – The ball carrier must hold the ball in two hands when within three meters (3m) of defenders.
Penalty: *Tap & pass*
- 10.10 **No Obstruction** - Attackers cannot deliberately get in the way of a defender attempting to make a tag, and defenders cannot deliberately impede the progress of the ball carrier or any other attacker.
Penalty: *Tap & pass*

Whenever the Tag Rugby rules are broken, a *tap & pass* is awarded to the non-offending team at the place the infringement took place and the number of tags (*Tag Count*) starts back to zero. If the infringement took place over the *try-line*, or within five metres (5m) of it, the *tap & pass* is awarded five metres (5m) out from the *try-line* to create some space.

RULE 11 - Discipline

- 11.1 All players, teachers and coaches will be expected to abide by the rules of the game and decisions made by the officials and referees. They will be expected to play fairly and in the correct spirit of the game. However, in the event of misconduct and/or repeated and deliberate breaking of the rules or dangerous play, then the referee/tournament officials shall, at their discretion, caution, sin bin (five (5) minutes) yellow card, dismiss (send off) red card the player or request he/she leaves the tournament area altogether. Any player sent off or sin binned cannot be replaced. A player sin binned must give his/her tags to the referee and take up a position behind the opposition's *dead ball line* for the duration of the five (5) minutes. If a player is sin binned just before the half time break, the duration of half time does not constitute as any part of the five (5)

minutes suspension period. If a player is sent off (red carded) in a match during a festival/tournament, then that player is excluded from taking part in any other match in that festival/tournament.

- 11.2 Teachers/Coaches, team managers, captains and parents are expected to lead by example and encourage their players to play by the rules, accept the referee's decision and display good sportsmanship at all times.

CODE OF CONDUCT – How should we behave?

The game of Tag Rugby should be enjoyed by all involved. To help create an environment for this to take place it is important that we remember a few basic ethics of sport.....

- 1. Recognise the importance of fun and enjoyment for all involved.**
- 2. Play fairly and by the rules of the game.**
- 3. Be positive with the referee and develop a team respect for them. Don't argue with them or constantly question their decisions. Remember, they are unpaid volunteers giving up their own free time and without them there would be no game!**
- 4. Be a good sport - applaud good play whether by your own team or by your opponents.**
- 5. Help create an enjoyable environment in which to play the game.**
- 6. Do not ridicule or shout at players who lack ability or make mistakes.**
- 7. Praise efforts, not results.**
- 8. Support all efforts to remove any verbal or physical abuse from the game.**

You can also view all the rules of Tag Rugby on the following website:

www.tagrugby.org