



British Columbia Rugby Referees' Society

REFEREEING SEVEN ASIDE RUGBY



This document is aimed to outline a foundation for a common point of reference for refereeing Seven Aside Rugby.

HISTORY OF SEVEN-A-SIDE RUGBY

By Chris Thau on IRB.com

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, Earlstoun, 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 Earlstoun 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 'Tokie' 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, which has been played now on five occasions, 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 re-inclusion of Sevens back into Olympics for the first time since 1924 in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro is a testament to the drawing power of Sevens as a major player on the world sports stage.

“The Rugby World Cup Sevens 2009 in Dubai shattered all previous tournament broadcast records. The historic tournament, which was the first to incorporate a 16-team women’s event running alongside the men’s competition, was broadcast to 760 million people in 141 countries through 29 international broadcasters in 19 languages.”

—International Rugby Board

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 the **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 the **IRB Playing Charter**



SEVENS vs. FIFTEENS

A. Differences in **MIND SET**:

- Possession is everything.
- Certain teams choose to avoid contact.
- There are more quick tap penalties.
- There are more quick throw-ins at line-outs.

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

- Seven players.
- Times:
 - Two seven-minute halves with a one-minute halftime.
 - Ten-minute half for finals.
 - Two minutes: sin bin.
 - Forty seconds: conversions.
 - Thirty seconds: penalties and free 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.
- Only three substitutes are allowed per match.
- 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.



REFEREEING SEVEN-A-SIDE RUGBY

Use all of your experience and skills 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.

Speed, Pace and Quickness

The IRB Sevens World Series established standards for playing, coaching and refereeing Sevens rugby that should be adopted as our National Sevens standards.

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.

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

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.

Ball Availability

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

Defending

Defenders slow down the release of the tackled player and the playing of the ball to allow more time for the defence 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 opposition players on their feet. Attacking team wants to set up a ruck to create an off-side line.



What to Look Out For at the Tackle:

Through The Gate

Be vigilant for players entering the tackle zone from the side. Do not let the defence 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

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

Players wide of the tackle, i.e., more than a meter away, are allowed to play without regard for the direction in which they approach to play.

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 *squeeze ball*, the ball must come out **immediately**.

One-On-One Tackles

Be aware of tacklers using the tackled player or the ball as leverage to help themselves get up from the ground. They must release the tackled player and get up under their own steam. (Look for some separation.)

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?

RUCKS/MAULS

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. On occasions, 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**.

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

Very few mauls occur in Sevens. Mostly a defensive move, mauls are usually formed to tie-up and hold the ball carrier and force a turnover (scrum put-in).

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 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.

The props must not bind on each other.

The hooker must independently bind to each of the props. The hooker may legally over-bind or under-bind.

Over-binding is a more powerful option, but under-binding will put the hooker into open play more often. The over-bind usually gives the hooker more push (strength), while the under-bind 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.

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 their back parallel to the ground. Do not allow that player to turn in or pop up in the scrum.

More to do at the Scrum

Use a full scrum count. Ensure that the scrum engagement is always a 4 count:

Crouch... Touch... Pause... Engage.

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 feet of the scrum. This Law 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.

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. Go directly back to the hindmost foot in 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. The whole thing 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.

Look Out For at the Scrum:

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 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 certainly 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 a **penalty offense**.



KICK-OFF/RESTART KICKS

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 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 defence 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 not played by an opponent first.
- 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.

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 be standing in front of a receiver and obstructing 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.



LINE-OUT

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

The changes in line-out Laws have affected the line-out more than any phase of play in Sevens. They were designed to open the game up, offer more options for players and coaches, and speed up the pace of the game.

Some of the most important are:

If a team chooses to have a receiver (a player in position to catch the ball when line-out players pass or knock the ball back from the line-out), that player must be two meters away from the line-out itself. The non-throwing team must have a player positioned in the *tramlines* (5m x 10m box) a minimum of two meters from the line of touch AND the five-meter line. The Referee will be able to clearly identify which player is the receiver and will be able to clearly see that the player immediately opposing the thrower is not a line-out player.

Line-out players may pre-grip a jumper before the ball is thrown in. Players will no longer be required to wait until the player throwing in has released the ball before they grip a player who will jump to catch the ball. The lifting of line-out players is permitted. However, support players must wait until the ball has left the hands of the player throwing it in before lifting their teammate.

Numbers in the line-out matter. The team throwing in the ball in the line-out decides the maximum number of players in the line-out. The opposing team may have fewer line-out players but may not have more.

Be prepared for many quick throw-ins. A quick throw in may now be thrown in straight or towards the throwing team's own goal line. This is important because it allows teams a chance to counter attack before their opponents have had a chance to get into defensive position. 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 line-out can occur when players throw the ball into 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.

Be sure the quick line-out ball 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.
3. The ball is thrown in between where it went into touch and the player's goal line.
4. Must occur before a line-out has formed. A line-out has formed when at least two players from each team are at the line of touch. (Do not allow teams to purposefully delay formation of the line-out in order to give themselves more of an opportunity to take a quick throw.)

More to do at the Lineout

Defending players must not prevent the ball being thrown in five meters. **Free 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—with 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. If there are problems at the front (e.g. ball not being thrown in five meters or the line-out is close to the goal line), by all means take the front.

Two-handed take

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.

Keep the non-participants back 10m. It is important to do this until the lineout is over so that the proper space remains for the ball winning team to attack.



ADVANTAGE

In Sevens, quality possession IS advantage.

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

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.

No matter how play develops, always call out (verbalize) **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 determine play.

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 a while to work their way through the defence. At the recent Rugby World Cup Sevens in Dubai, over half (52%) of the tries scored in the Men's Tournament originated in the scoring team's own half.



REFEREE POSITIONING IN OPEN-PLAY

A Referee should be positioned slightly ahead of play.

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 defence line running can lead, if the Referee is not careful, in their 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 too deep to avoid interfering with play, but this can remove the Referee from play.

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 position 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 so that you can see forward passes and you can be there at the next tackle. 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.

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.

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.

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.

More on Refereeing Positioning in Open Play

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.

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. Follow the interception—you just have to run!

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.



AWARDING PENALTIES

Be prepared for penalties to be taken quickly.

Work to allow the quick tap.

Penalty Mark

If the player knows where the penalty mark is, you should work on getting the offenders back ten meters. 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!***

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 principle”), and/or allows an unfair advantage to the non-offending team.



FOUL/DANGEROUS PLAY

YELLOW CARDS / RED CARDS

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

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 rationalize it or excuse it away.

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 allow players to waste time, e.g. throwing or kicking the ball away after a penalty has been awarded. This should earn a yellow card. If you believe a team is trying to waste time unfairly, consider stopping the game clock as a management tool.

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.

Use common sense!



More on Foul/Dangerous Play

Judge each tackle on its merit.

Determine fact, not intent.

1. High tackles
2. Shirt pulling
3. Throwing or taking the ball away after a penalty award.
4. 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.

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.



ASSISTANT REFEREES

Assistant referees will provide assistance to the referee in the performance of any of the referee's duties as directed by the referee.

—From **Law 6, IRB Laws of the Game**

The Referee and the two Assistant Referees need to clearly communicate and understand their duties and responsibilities.

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 signalling 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 Foul Play

If you see foul play, report it 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.



More on Assistant Refereeing

- 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.**
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.
- 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. 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. Send off **(Red Card)**
 2. Formal caution and temporary suspension **(Yellow Card)**
 3. Severe reprimand **(Admonishment)**.

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.)

NOTE: Help 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.

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.

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.**

Even More on Assistant Refereeing

Primary Duties

- Signal touch.
- Mark the place where the line-out will take place and indicate which team is to throw the ball in.

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.

Assistant Referee Positioning

Appropriate *Leading* Positioning:

The leading Assistant Referee is the one on the touchline to which the ball is travelling.

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 efficient 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**.



IN-GOAL JUDGES

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

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. It is critical to maintain eye contact with the Referee.

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.

Reporting foul play

You are responsible for reporting foul play that occurs in the in-goal area and in other parts of the field when you clearly and accurately observe foul play.

The In-Goal Judge and the Referee then communicate. (There is no need for a board meeting, unless an Assistant Referee has something to add to the situation.)

The In-Goal Judge will give the offending player's number and team.

1. Concentrate on the offender until the number can be identified.
2. The Assistant Referee gives a precise and accurate description of the offense.
3. The Referee MAY REQUEST a sanction recommendation for a:
 - Send off (**Red Card**)
 - Formal caution and temporary suspension (**Yellow Card**)
 - Severe reprimand (**Admonishment**).

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.

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.

More on In-Goal Judging

Two In-Goal Judges are appointed for each match.

Primary Duties

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

Foul Play

1. If in radio contact, let the Referee know you have a foul play report.
2. Assume your normal duties until the next stoppage of play.
3. Enter field of play if invited.
4. Follow reporting protocol and give:
 - Number and team.
 - What.
 - Where.
 - Recommend sanction, if requested.

In-Goal Judge Positioning

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

- 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 is Justified

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 favoured 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.

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.

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 obtain optimum positions to referee all the phases of the match; particularly crucial for goal-line decisions.
2. Your credibility among the players, coaches and referees will suffer.
3. Your concentration levels will suffer as the game progresses.

- **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.

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

Gordon Tietjens' training regimen is famous in the Sevens world. Every emphasis is geared to the Sevens game and developing endurance and conditioning to cope with the demands of the shortened version of the game on the international stage.

We certainly do a lot of speed endurance, repeated speed work . . . phosphate testing. (We) do beep testing as well and that is, I suppose, Sevens conditioning if you like. It's all about Sevens, repeated speed, speed endurance. There is no sense being a sprinter and the quickest player in the world if you are only good for one run on a defence or attack. For us it is being able to do it again and again and again and that is what we do . . . even though (we) are testing (our players) so hard physically, it is the real mental side you are challenging as well; so being mentally and physically fit are obviously huge ingredients in a Sevens rugby player.

—Gordon Tietjens, New Zealand Sevens coach

MATCH OFFICIALS' OBJECTIVE

To be unobtrusive and accurate — allowing the players to display their skills and provide exciting tournaments leading to

ENJOYMENT FOR ALL!



Special thanks to Patrick McNally (USA National Sevens Referee Program Manager)
and USA Sevens Refereeing Rugby Handbook