



**NEW ZEALAND  
RUGBY LEAGUE  
MATCH OFFICIALS**

# NZRL COACHING MATCH OFFICIALS GUIDELINES 2016

These guidelines have been produced so that referees and coaches of match officials have a consistent approach to the game throughout New Zealand irrespective of age, group, or representative fixture.

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## **1. TACKLE AND PLAY THE BALL**

A player in possession is tackled:

### **Grounded**

When he/she is held by one or more opposing players and the ball or the hand or arm holding the ball comes into contact with the ground.

### **Upright**

When he/she is held by one or more opposing players in such a manner that he/she can make no further progress and cannot part with the ball.

### **Succumbing**

When, being held by an opponent, the tackled player makes it evident that he has succumbed to the tackle and wishes to be released in order to play-the-ball.

\*succumb includes a player in possession being lifted off the ground and resulting in the calling of held by the referee

### **Hand on player**

When he/she is lying on the ground and an opponent places a hand on him/her.

### **At the completion of the tackle:**

The player in possession shall be immediately released by the defender and/or defenders.

### **Methods that impede the immediate release of the player in possession**

- a. Flop onto the player in possession who is grounded
- b. Working a player in possession
- c. Leg Pulls
- d. Leaving or placing the hands or arms on the ball or the arms of the player in possession once the tackle is complete
- e. Spinning on the player in possession once the tackle is complete
- f. Defenders "peeling off" the player in possession
- g. Climbing over the player in possession once the tackle is complete
- h. Crowding the player in possession once the tackle is complete using their knees, arms or body
- i. Pulls the player in possession to the ground once the tackle is complete

### **Defenders' responsibilities**

- a. At the completion of the tackle the defenders must take up a position as a marker or retire 10 metres
- b. A marker must take up a position directly "opposite the tackled player" and not float or be too deep from the play-the-ball
- c. The marker must not kick the ball whilst it is being played
- d. A second marker must stand immediately and directly behind the first marker

### **Surrender tackle**

Is when a player in possession surrenders their run in or at the line (including spearing out of the in-goal).

The defender/s are permitted to work the player on the ground, move to a bear hug position, and lie on the player in position or spin to the front of the tackle.

It is the sole responsibility of the referee to identify the tackle and call it.

Referee vocabulary – “SURRENDER”.

### **Shoulder charge**

Is where defenders, without attempting to tackle, grab or hold the ball-carrier (or any opposing player) using the arms or hands, make direct physical contact using the shoulder or the upper arm (tucked in by their side).

The indicators will include:

1. Rotation of the defender's hips and shoulders
2. Defender has tucked his arm into his body
3. No genuine attempt to make a tackle

### **Third person into a tackle**

When a player in possession is held in an upright tackle, any other defender/s must make initial contact above the knees of the player in possession.

Regardless of the point of impact, a player can still be penalised for any forceful, dangerous or unnecessary contact at the legs that involves risk of injury to the player in possession.

In relation to this type of tackle the referee will call 'held' and then 'release'.

### **Tackling a kicker**

When affecting a tackle on a kicker, the defenders must make a genuine attempt to tackle which is not:

1. Late
2. High and/or not a genuine attempt to make a tackle
3. Puts the kicker in a dangerous position

### **Responsibilities of player in possession**

The tackled player shall:

- A. Without delay, regain feet where tackled
- b. Lift the ball clear of the ground
- c. Face opponents' goal line
- d. Place the ball on the ground
- e. Make a genuine attempt to play the ball with foot and maintain their balance

### **Player in possession to return to mark**

If the player in possession simultaneously offloads the ball or continues to run after the tackle is complete, the Referee will direct the player in possession back to the original position to play the ball.

If a player dives forward after the tackle is complete the referee will direct the player to return to the original position.

## 2. TEN METRES

### Ten metres

All defending players, except those who have taken up a position as marker(s), must retire ten metres from the point at which the ball is played or to their own goal line.

All defending players are required to be 'in line' with the referee marking the ten metres. The referee will call "go" when the ball is clear of the ruck and the defensive line is entitled to move forward.

If the defensive line is within ten metres of their goal line, the players:

1. Must be touching the goal line with a foot; and
2. The defenders cannot place their front foot past the centre of the ruck.

### Offside

A player is offside if he has one foot (either on or off the ground) in front of a teammate who "last touches, is touched, held or kicked the ball".

### Out of play

A player from the team in possession is out of play if he does not "retire behind his own players involved in the play-the-ball or to their own goal line".

'Out of play' player(s) may again participate in the play if he/she retreats to a position where he/she has both feet behind the point where the ball was placed on the ground in the prior play-the-ball.

Where an 'out of play' player becomes involved in the ensuing play, he/she is to be penalised with the penalty being awarded in line with the previous play-the-ball, at the point where the player became out of play.

### Downtown chasers

A player is considered downtown when:

A player who is in front of the kicker in general play intentionally advances beyond the point of the previous play-the-ball before the ball has gone past him.

### 3. SCRUMS

A scrum is to be formed and decided by:

- Front row to interlock arms. Hooker's arms over the shoulders of the front rowers.
- Second row to interlock arms and head in the space provided by the front row.
- Loose forward's (lock) arms around the outside of the second rowers and head in the space provided by the second rowers.
- All players outside the scrum, other than the scrum halves, shall retire ten metres or more behind the mark where the scrum is formed and shall remain until the ball emerges correctly from the scrum.
- Halfback to hold ball in two hands and square to the tunnel and feed on the same side as the referee.
- The defending halfback should stand in line with last row of forwards (in line with the last man down) and within touching distance of the scrum.
- Front row forwards, on the side where the ball is put into the scrum, **MUST** have their outside feet forward.
- The ball must emerge from the scrum after first emerging from between and behind the inner feet of the second row forwards. This will be indicated by the referee calling "out".

#### **4. PLAYER MISCONDUCT**

A player is guilty of misconduct if he/she:

1. Trips, kicks or strikes another player.
2. When affecting or attempting a tackle, makes contact with the head or neck of an opponent intentionally, recklessly or carelessly.
3. Uses any dangerous throw when affecting a tackle.
4. Applies unnecessary pressure or twists including grapples, crushers or performs a chicken wing on a player in possession.
5. Unnecessarily contacts a player not in possession or a kicker.
6. When a defender forcefully spears at the legs of a player in possession exposing him/her to unnecessary risk of injury.
7. Shoulder charges.
8. Disputes a decision of the referee or touch judge.

#### **Sin bin**

The six main reasons for a player to be temporarily suspended for a period of time are:

1. Repeated infringements
2. Professional foul
3. Cooling off period for a player
4. Dissent
5. Punching
6. Foul play not deemed serious enough for send off

#### **Captain's communication**

The captain may only approach the referee at a stoppage of play or at half time when leaving the field. A stoppage of play includes: TRIES, GOAL-LINE DROP OUTS OR INJURIES.

In speaking to the referee, a player must not question or refer to the referee's ability or integrity.

The referee will not debate decisions with the captain.

## **5. RESTARTS OF PLAY**

### **Penalties or free kicks**

Quick penalties will be permitted only once the referee gives the player the mark and all players from the kicking side are onside.

The referee must be in the correct position and ready for play to commence before allowing the Penalty Tap to be taken. The referee should also ensure they take up the correct position as quickly as possible so not to disadvantage the team in possession any further.

Quick restarts should not be allowed within 10 metres of the scoring try line, for 10m offside penalties, when the mark has been advanced, where the referee is required to give a caution or Sin Bin. In these situations the referee shall control the taking of the penalty.

### **Goal line drop outs**

#### **Touch in goal**

The ball is in touch when it touches the corner post, in-goal line or any object on or outside the touch-in-goal line.

Where the ball which is stationary in the in-goal area comes into contact with a player in touch-in-goal or over the dead ball line, the ball is deemed to have been made dead by that player.

A kick in general play is made dead by a defending player straddling the dead ball line or touch-in-goal line, other than being caught on the full.

The non-kicking team must allow the ball to bounce on the ground on or outside the dead ball line and/or touch-in-goal lines for it to be made dead by the kicking team, otherwise play will be restarted with a goal line drop out.

#### **20 metre restart**

All match officials are required to be in position. In position means that the referee is to be on the 30 metre line and that both touch judges are to be on the 20 metre line, or on the 20 metre line with both touch judges on the 30 metre line. Irrespective of which line the referee wishes to stand on they must be in a stationary position for a controlled restart.

All players from the kicking side must be on-side and the kick must be taken at the centre of the 20 metre line.

If any player from the non-kicking side is not behind the 30 metre line and becomes involved in the play a penalty will be awarded at the centre of the 20 metre line.

The initial tackle is tackle 1.

#### **40/20 general play kick**

If a ball is kicked by a player in general play from within his/her 40 metre area and finds touch in his/her opponent's 20 metre area (other than on the full), the kicking side will have the loose head and feed at the scrum.



## 6. SCORING A TRY

### Scoring a try is when:

- a. A player first grounds the ball in his opponents in-goal
- b. Opposing players simultaneously ground the ball in the in-goal
- c. A tackled player's momentum carries him/her into the opponent's in-goal where the ball is grounded

### Grounding

- a. Placing the ball on the ground with hand or hands, wrist or forearm
- b. Exerting a downward pressure on the ball in contact with the ground
- c. Dropping on the ball and covering it with the front part of the body above the waist and below the neck

A player who has had possession or touches/touched the ball and knocks the ball forward must regain possession (catch, hold or grip) prior to the ball hitting the ground, another player, goal post or cross bar.

For the ball to be deemed grounded, pressure must be applied by the player's fingers, hand, wrist, forearm, or torso so as to create a reasonable influence on the plane of the ball including the spin, rotation, momentum or bounce.

### Double movement

A try will be awarded if:

- A tackled player's momentum carries him into the opponent's in-goal where he/she grounds the ball even if the ball has first touched the ground in the field of play.
- In the process of scoring a try a player must not promote the ball from the position the ball has been grounded.
- If the momentum of the player in possession carries him into the opponent's in-goal area, it will not be a double movement if the ball would have finished over the goal line regardless of any subsequent movement of the ball or the arm carrying the ball.

### Penalty try

The referee may award a penalty try if, in his/her opinion, a try would have been scored but for the unfair play of the defending team. A penalty try is awarded between the goal posts irrespective of where the offence occurred.

### Possible 8 point try

If a player fouls an opponent who is touching down for a try, a penalty kick at goal shall be taken from in front of the goal posts after the attempt to convert the try.

Touching down includes in the act of scoring and until the try scorer regains their feet.

### Grounding the ball in own in-goal

For the ball to be deemed dead the player in possession must intentionally ground the ball in his/her in-goal.

### Corner post

A player in possession of the ball is permitted to come in contact with the corner post, provided that the player makes no contact with any part of his body with either the touch-in-goal line or the touch line.

## 7. OBSTRUCTION

### Indicators of obstruction

- a. "Block" or "flat" runner(s) (who do not receive the ball) must not stop in the middle of the defensive line
- b. "Block" or "flat" runner(s) (who do not receive the ball) must not run at chest or outside shoulder of defender(s) and initiate contact
- c. The ball runner cannot run behind his own team and **gain an advantage**
- d. Players in possession who run a sweep line must receive the ball beyond the inside shoulder of the "block" or "flat runner(s)
- e. Defensive decisions that commit defender(s) to decoy runners will not be considered obstruction
- f. Defensive decisions the commit defender(s) to change their defensive line will not be deemed obstruction

### The Wall

If two or more players form a wall (side by side) next to the play-the-ball and don't allow the opportunity for a defending player to move directly towards the player in possession, the referee will penalise for obstruction.

### Escorts

A player is not to deliberately obstruct an opponent who is not in possession.

It will be interpreted to be obstruction in regards to a player catching the ball from a kick if:

1. A player arrives at the same time as an opponent and obstructs him/her deliberately
2. Deliberately runs an opponent off the ball

This applies to both the kicking and non-kicking team.

It will not be considered an obstruction in regards to a player catching the ball from a kick if:

1. A defending player moves directly towards the ball: and
2. Takes up a position prior to the ball being caught

### Diving through the ruck

If, in the process of scoring a try, an attacking player dives through the ruck or into a teammate including the player who played the ball and impacts on the defence, he/she will be penalised for obstruction.

### Sleeper

An attacking player who loiters next to the play-the-ball area and who causes an obstruction will be penalised.

### Lending weight

It is permissible for a player to lend weight to a teammate in possession in order to avoid losing ground.

1. It is not permissible for the player lending weight to impede a defender from making the tackle
2. The referee will take into account any momentum the tackle has already generated

## **NZRL mouth guard policy**

It is compulsory for all players playing in a sanctioned competition by the NZRL and its members to wear a protective mouth guard.

The No Mouth Guard, No Game Policy is to be firmly enforced.

Players are not permitted to share mouth guards.

Prior to the game, the referee and/or touch judges will check that all players (including reserves) have a mouth guard. During the course of a match, any player found not to have a mouth guard in their mouth and not having a mouth guard in their possession (due to having it dislodged as a result of tackle) will be made to leave the field. On obtaining a replacement mouth guard, he/she may re-enter the field of play after reporting to a touch judge.

In the event of a player being unable to obtain a replacement mouth guard, he/she may take no further part in the game but may be substituted, with that substitution counting as an interchange.

During the course of a match, any player found not to have a mouth guard in their mouth, but have one in their possession (in their sock or pocket etc.) will be penalised and sin binned for ten minutes.

Referee to use common sense in enforcing this policy in regards to players approaching scrum with it in their hand and other incidents where there is a break in play.

## **Safeplay Code**

It is mandatory that any act that transgresses the Safeplay Code be followed by a penalty, plus a caution and instruction to the defender. The "sin-bin" does not apply to mini-mod football. Any additional action to a penalty in mini-mod football is "temporary suspension", with a replacement of the offender for the remainder of that period of play. A player returning to the field after suspension and who is guilty of further misconduct is to be dismissed without replacement.

For players 13-15 years, international law applies to misconduct.

The Safeplay Code was developed to emphasise safety and good conduct within the game of Rugby League by creating the best possible on field environment and actively controlling undesirable actions. The code applies to all players up to and including under 15 age groups.

The NZRL trusts that players, coaches, parents and supporters will wholeheartedly embrace the code for the benefit of the players and the game.

## **NZRL Concussion Policy**

As part of his/her duty of care, if a match official suspects a player has suffered a concussion, he/she must leave the field immediately, not return to the field of play and be referred to a specialist for assessment.

If a team fails to comply with the match official's decision, officials from the club/team may be liable in a court of law.

## Notable NZRL Rule Variations to International Law

- 1. In-goal length:** NZRL allows a variation of between 6 – 11 metres for in-goal length.
- 2. Minimum number of players:** The minimum number of players per team to start the match is ten. The minimum number allowed on the field in a match is nine. If less than nine players currently participating in the match then for safety reasons, the match shall be terminated. Current participants are players on the field and players that have been temporarily suspended (blood bin and sin bin). Dismissed players are not deemed as current participants.
- 3. Blood bin:** When a player is bleeding, the referee shall direct him/her to leave the field for attention on the sideline and when treated he/she may return to the field. If the player is replaced whilst receiving attention that replacement will count as one of the twelve (12) interchanges.
- 4. Foul play replacements:** In the event of a player being forced to leave the field as a result of foul play and the offending player being dismissed from the field, sin binned, placed on report or penalised, a free interchange shall be allowed. If the fouled player returns to the field, this shall count as an interchange.
- 5. On field trainers:** Only two trainers are permitted on the field at one time when their team is in possession of the ball for the purpose of hydration or attending to an injured player. They must enter the field from behind their own team.
- 6. Extra time:** In the event of extra time being played an additional two interchanges will be added to the team's interchanges not already used at the conclusion of normal time. E.g. if a team had four remaining interchanges not used at the conclusion of normal time they may make up to six interchanges in extra time. To protect player safety the maximum length a game may be played is 25% longer than its allocated time i.e. an 80 minute game can last no longer than 100 minutes, a 60 minute game can last no longer than 75 minutes.
- 7. Recommencing play after injury:** If a player in possession is injured in a tackle and unable to play the ball the referee may, without stopping the game, provided he is satisfied that continuance of play would not endanger the injured player, instruct the play the ball at a point five metres in field from the point where the player was injured (International Rule Book indicates scrum).
- 8. Restart play at 20m, wording change:** The ball may be kicked in any manner and in any direction and is immediately in play. Opposing players shall not advance until the ball has been kicked. Defending players shall not advance in front of the ball before it is kicked. Any deliberate offence by either team shall incur a penalty to be awarded at the centre of the 20m line.
- 9. Drop-out from goal line:** A kick in general play that is stationary or rolling is made dead by a defending player straddling the dead ball line or touch-in-goal line, other than a ball caught or touched on the full.
- 10. Touch-in-goal wording:** The ball is dead in goal when it or a player in contact with it touches this touch-in-goal or any object on or outside the dead ball line.
- 11. Mid-air tackles:** This applies to both attacking and defending players attempting to catch the ball.

- 12. Simultaneous held:** If referee calls “held” as the ball carrier runs on or passes, the referee will stop play and send that player back to play the ball.
- 13. Stealing ball in act of scoring:** It is permissible to steal the ball while the player is attempting to ground the ball for a try.
- 14. Offence against try scorer:** “touching down for a try” means in the act of scoring or while player is regaining his/her feet.
- 15. Additional misconduct:** Intentionally dives at the non-kicking leg of an opponent and tackles a player who leaps into the air to retrieve a kick and whose feet have not returned to the ground.
- 16. Mouth guard:** Mouth guards are compulsory - see page 10 of rule book.
- 17. Stealing the ball:** A defender may strip the ball when the tackler player is attempting to ground the ball for a try (regardless of more than one in the tackle).
- 18. Misconduct:** Addition of (l) intentionally dives at the non-kicking leg of an opponent, (m) tackles a player who leaps into the air to retrieve a kick whose feet have not returned to the ground, (n) makes an attempted act of reckless or intentional conduct, e.g. Raised elbow, swinging arm.
- 19. Playing area:** The referee is in control of the players whenever they are in the playing area and environment of access and changing areas.

## Notable NZRL Variations to NRL

1. Mid-air tackles are illegal for both the attacking and defending players.
2. No scrum clocks.
3. No drop out clocks.
4. The restart of play as a result of a successful 40/20 kick is a scrum loose head and feed to the team that kicked the ball.
5. There are only six tackles at a 20m optional restart.
6. When a ball is kicked into touch on the full, tackles one through five, this will result in a scrum loose head and feed to the non-kicking team at point of kick. The scrum must be a minimum of 20m infield from touch. Only a kick on the last tackle will result in a handover.
7. The mark for offside penalties at a 20m restart is the centre of 20m.
8. Marker infringements for not square, depth, moving early regardless of first or second marker are in line with the ruck 10m back. Offences for hand on ball, stripping and foul play, the mark is at the play the ball.
9. Dead ball decision: A kick in general play that is stationary or rolling is made dead by a defending player straddling the dead ball line or touch in goal line, other than a ball caught or touched on the full. (NRL the ball is not deemed dead until the ball touches the ground outside field of play or object outside of field of play. If the ball touches a defender regardless of whether they are in or out of the field of play, before the ball touches the ground or object outside the field of play, then the defender will be deemed to have made the ball dead, except for a kick on the full).
10. Time off: No mandatory time off for scrums (30 seconds NRL, or when one team is packed), last five minutes of play, or conversion attempts. The referee must allow a reasonable amount of time and is the sole judge of when to call time off.