

# FLAG RUGBY

## HANDBOOK





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Rookie Rugby which is a safe, non-contact, and easy to play game for students of all ages and athletic ability. This handbook is designed explain how to play Flag Rugby as part of the Rookie Rugby programming in schools, as well as with afterschool and third-party partners that would like to introduce flag rugby to your students / children.

## PLAY WITH FLAGS

The game of Rookie Rugby is played with flags to replace the action of tackling. Flag rugby is the preferred method to introduce rugby. If no flags are available, the game can be played as two hand touch; however, flags are always the better option. Rookie Rugby is played with flags for several reasons:

1. Flag rugby eliminates the opportunity for players to push or shove. Flag rugby increases the safety of the game for kids, especially when playing indoors.
2. Ball carriers will clearly know when their flag is pulled, creating continuity. This free-flowing part of the game is vitally important for new players to learn the basic skills of rugby.
3. Athletes will proclaim "FLAG" as they pull each flag, making a clear indicator for the referee. Determining if a two-handed touch has been made can be more difficult.
4. Flag rugby virtually eliminates body-to-body contact, which allows for less issues with co-ed play.
5. Using flags more closely reflect a tackle situation in rugby by taking both players out of the game temporarily. Similar to tackle rugby, both the ball carrier and defensive player must perform a task before returning to play. The ball carrier must pass the ball and replace their flag, and the defensive player must return the pulled flag to the ball carrier.





# RULE SUMMARY



This summary outlines the rules to Flag Rugby in three sections and will be explained in further detail later in this document.

## CLASSROOM / SINGLE GAME

These rules should be used in the school classroom, recess, or afterschool/third party environment when only one game is going to be played.

### Number of Players

- Between 4-7 players per side

### Field Size

- Can vary depending on age of players
- Length = 40-60m
- Width = 25-40m

### Duration

- No more than 30 minutes total
- Can range from 7-15 minutes per half
- Halftime can range from 2-5 minutes

### Ball Size

- Size 4 is most commonly used for Flag Rugby
- Can vary on age group:
  - Size 3 (Elementary School)
  - Size 4 (Middle School)
  - Size 5 (High School)

### Scoring

- A try is worth 5 points
- If the flag is pulled while scoring, the try counts if the ball carrier is within 3 steps
- No diving for a score. Players must stay on their feet
- No conversions

### Flag Pulls

- Ball carrier must pass the ball within 3 steps or 3 seconds of their flag being pulled

### Number of Flag Pulls

- The offense attempts to score within 6 flag pulls.
- The ball is turned over after the 6th flag pull

### Restarts

- All restarts are done with a "tap and pass"
- Player tapping the ball must pass
- Defense must be 5 meters back

### No Kicking, Lineouts or Scrums

### Rolling substitutions are allowed

- Substitutions occur at a restart or dead ball

## GAME MODIFICATIONS

These are modifications to the game you can use to make the games more challenging:

- Allow unlimited flag pulls on offense (usually for the younger age grades)
- Allow kicking at the start, restart and during open play (usually for the older age grades)
- Scoring can be modified to allow a 7-point (center) try

## TOURNAMENT RULES

These rules should be used in any tournament setting, whether that be in the schools, afterschool/third party, or Flag Fest event:

- 7 minutes halves across all age grades with a 2 minute halftime
- Games cannot end on a penalty
- Pool game may end in a tie
- Playoff / Championship games cannot end in a tie and can go into overtime



## THE FIELD

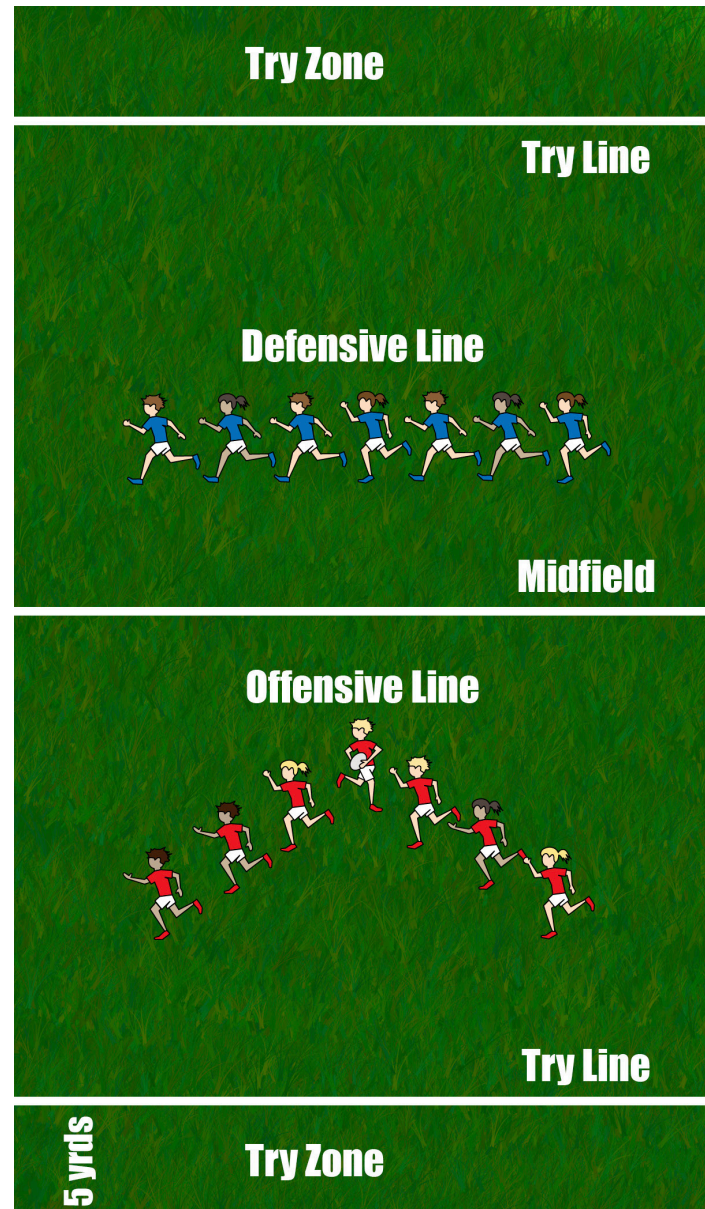
Rookie Rugby can be played in any open space of any size. You can play on grass, in a parking lot, even inside a gym! A field no larger than 60 meters in length and 40 meters in width is recommended. The size of the field can be adapted to suit the age and ability of the teams participating. The try zone should be 5 yards deep from the try line and clearly marked with cones or lines.

## TIME OF PLAY

A game is made up of two halves. It is recommended that each half last between 5 and 15 minutes, depending on player's age and ability. Halftime should be between 2-5 minutes in length.

## TEAM COMPOSITION

Rookie Rugby is played between two teams with equal numbers of players on each team. Each team contains no more than seven players and no less than four. Each team may have an agreed number of substitutions. Substituted players may return to play but only when play has stopped. Each player is encouraged to play every position on the field. Remember, keep team numbers at or below 7v7! Rookie Rugby is about learning and participation. More players on the field means less opportunity for each player to pass, run, catch, defend, and score.

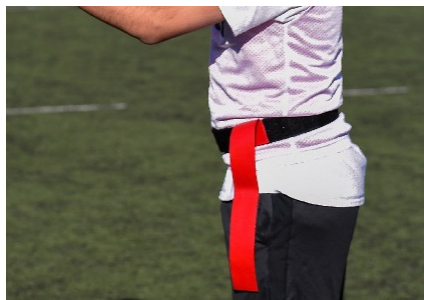


In Rookie Rugby, pulling a flag should be simple, as it simply moves the offense to their next phase. As such, rules around flags help promote flag tackling and make it easy on players:

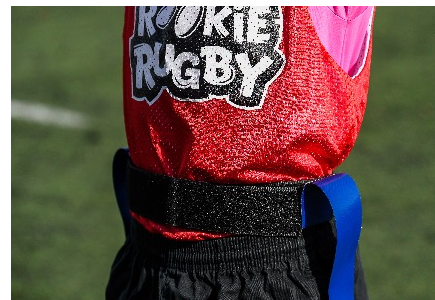
- 2 flags are worn, one on each hip
- Jerseys or shirts must be tucked into the flag belt, with no overlap.
- No knotting or tucking flags into belts or pockets

It is helpful to instruct participants to place flags upside down when play starts, so that the flags dog-ear and stick out from the hips. This can be difficult to enforce during open play. Once players have established a routine, however, the practice becomes second nature.

## CORRECT



Flags on hips, upside down



Jersey tucked into belt

## INCORRECT



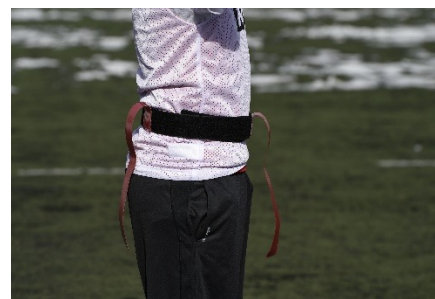
Flags knotted



Jersey untucked, covering flags



Flags tucked into pockets



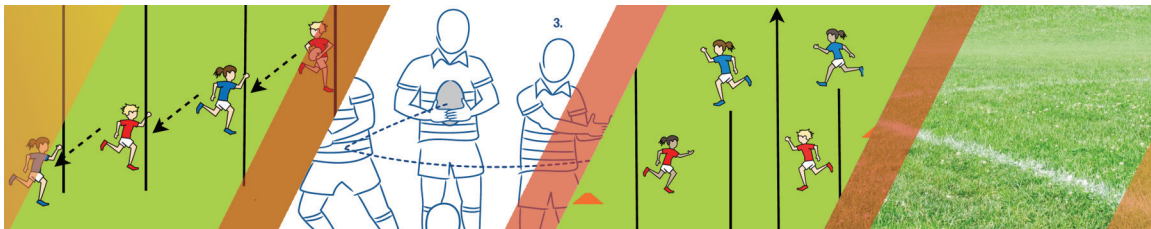
Flags not on hips

## SCORING

The objective of the game is to score more points than the opposing team. To earn points, the offensive team will work to move the ball forward until one player can run over the goal line and touch the ball to the ground with two hands. This action is called grounding the ball and will result in a score, which is called a 'try' in rugby, worth 5 points.

## MOVING THE BALL

Players move the ball forward by running the ball towards the opposition's try zone. Players run forward, passing the ball from one player to another. All passes in rugby must be thrown sideways or backwards, much like a lateral pass in football.





## THE GAME OF RUGBY

Being successful in rugby is a combination of offensive and defensive play. Ensuring success on the field means teaching your athletes the basics of both.

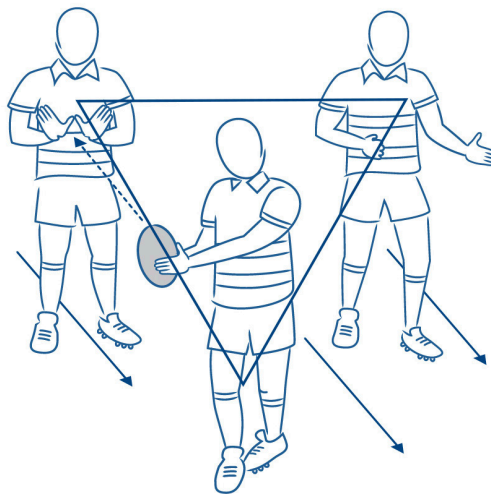
## OFFENSE

Offense in rugby is centered on two main principles: **Go Forward** and **Support**.

**Go Forward** means that in order to score, all offensive players, including support players, should be moving toward their opponent's try line. The easiest way to teach this concept is by using shapes, specifically triangles. Players will naturally run from sideline to sideline in order to avoid a flag pull. Get them moving forward by placing them in an offensive shape.

**Support** in rugby means that players are "following" the ball carrier in the proper position to receive a pass. Players should work to support their teammates and always be ready to receive a pass.

The most effective shape in rugby is a "triangle" because it provides the ball carrier multiple options. Since ball carriers can only pass laterally or backward, these players will be to the right and left, and a step behind, creating a triangle.



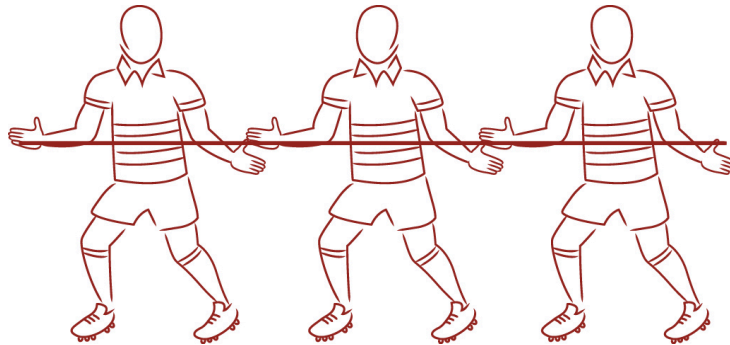
When a defensive player removes the ball carrier's flag, the defensive player is 'removed' from play until they return the flag. This creates a large open space in the defense, which is vulnerable for attack. Positioning players in support positions will enable them to take advantage of this situation. In order to be successful, support players must move forward into these open spaces.



## DEFENSE

Defense prevents the opposing team from scoring. Similar to offense, defense is also taught in a basic shape, in this case a flat line. A flat line defense is similar to a solid wall without space or gaps. Space a defensive line will create places for the offense to run through and score.

A great way to practice defense is having your team work together as a moving unit. When adding in an offensive team, move the ball up and down the field, as well as around to different players. Your defensive team will have to react and continue to get into position to maintain their flat line. Once players can understand the basics of defensive movement, you can introduce more advanced defensive concepts to defend more advanced offensive movements.



Before teaching defense to players, it is helpful to inform them of how defense moves with the offensive team. We have outlined some key questions that your players may ask, an explanatory answer, and a defensive command that can be used to help players get into position.

DEFENSIVE QUESTIONS	DEFENSIVE EXPLANATIONS	DEFENSIVE COMMAND
Where should I stand on defense?	All players are encouraged to "cross the street" in defense, making sure to look to their left and right. Players should be in line and "flat" with their teammates. This will help them be in the right position and ready to pull a flag.	Although there is no set command for being in the correct position, players tend to understand the command "FLAT". Both teammates and coaches can communicate this during games.
Do I have an opposite player that I guard?	Sort of. When positioning yourself on defense, it is smart to line yourself opposite from another player on the opposing team. This will help ensure that all offensive players are covered. Defense in rugby is a combination of man-to-man and zone defense.	There are no main commands for finding an opposing player while on defense. The best thing a player can do is count the offensive players and find the open person who has a clear path in front of them.
When do we move forward as a defensive line?	Remaining in a flat line is just one part of defense; moving as a team in the same direction is the other part. A defensive line will move forward or "up" towards the offense when the first pass is made after a penalty.	A common command that is used for moving forward on defense is "UP". This can be signaled by teammates and coaches.
When do we move back as a defensive line?	Similar to other movements, moving backwards as a team is important for maintaining a flat line. Players will need to move back when a penalty takes place and a free pass is awarded.	A simple command of "BACK" will help all players know that they need to back up to get in position.
Will the defense move left and right?	Yes! The defense will move in conjunction with the offensive team in order to contest possession. As play moves across the field, the defense will need to react and move as a team in their flat line.	The most common command for moving across the field are "SLIDE RIGHT" and "SLIDE LEFT". Whenever a player recognizes that the offensive play is moving in one direction, they can call out their teammates to slide.

## ADVANTAGE RULE

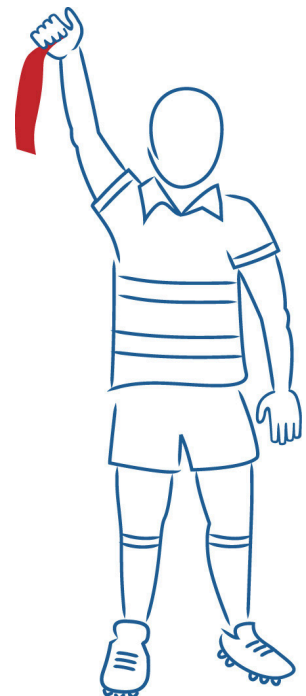
The rules of rugby were invented to keep play fair and continuous. An advanced concept of rugby, which features both ideas, is called Advantage. This rule comes into play after an infringement of the rules occurs. Although advantage can be found in many places during a regular game of rugby, we keep it simple in Rookie Rugby. The chart below outlines a few advancements for players to progress.

GAME SCENARIO	ROOKIE RUGBY RULE	ADVANTAGE PROGRESSION
A pass is dropped and fumbles forward and picked up by the defense.	Turnover to the other team.	Allow the defense to pick up the ball and play on without blowing the whistle.
A pass is dropped and fumbles forward and picked up by the offense.	Turnover to the other team.	Turnover to the other team. Restart play with a free pass.
A pass is dropped and fumbles backwards.	Play on.	In this case, the ball was not advanced forward. Either team can pick up the ball and play on without blowing a whistle.

## FLAG ETIQUETTE

While the offensive team attempts to move the ball forward, the defensive team will attempt to slow them down by pulling the ball carrier's flag, simulating a tackle. Once the ball carrier's flag is removed the game will continue by using the following flag etiquette:

1. Defender removes the flag, holds it up in the air and yells, "FLAG!"  
The defender is now out of play and should stand still.
2. The ball carrier must pass the ball to a teammate within three steps or three seconds. After the pass, the player with a flag missing is out of play.
3. While play continues the defender must return the flag to the offensive player before they can return to play.
4. The player whose flag was removed must replace their flag on their belt before returning to play.



## STARTING THE GAME AND RESTARTS

At the start of the game or after each score, the team who did not score or is starting the game takes a free pass from the center of the playing field. A free pass is an uncontested pass allowed from one player to a teammate. Remember it must be lateral or backwards.

## LINEOUTS

If the ball is passed or carried out of bounds a free pass is used to restart play. In Rookie Rugby, the free pass should be one yard in field from the sideline.

## PENALTIES

PENALTY	DEFINITION	RESULT
Forward Pass	In rugby, passes can only be made laterally or backwards. If a player passes the ball forward to a teammate it will result in a penalty.	A turnover will occur with the opposing team being awarded a free pass at the spot of the penalty.
Knock-On	A knock-on occurs when a player fumbles the ball forward.	A turnover will occur with the opposing team being awarded a free pass at the spot of the penalty.
Obstruction, Blocking, or Fending Off	Players must not obstruct a defender from pulling a flag.	A turnover will occur with the opposing team being awarded a free pass at the spot of the penalty.
Diving	Players must not dive when attempting to score a try. They must remain on their feet at all times.	A Try will not be awarded, and a free pass will be given five yards from the try line.
Deliberate Contact	Rookie Rugby is a non-contact game. If a player pushes or hits another player, it will result in a penalty.	A turnover will occur with the opposing team being awarded a free pass at the spot of the penalty.
Failure to Release the Ball	If a player fails to pass the ball within three seconds/ steps of getting their flag pulled it will result in a penalty.	A turnover will occur with the opposing team being awarded a free pass at the spot of the penalty.



Once players are comfortable with the basic play of Rookie Rugby, progressions of the game can be added. These progressions should only be introduced after players have mastered the intro game. They can be very useful for preparing players to move into higher-level rugby leagues.

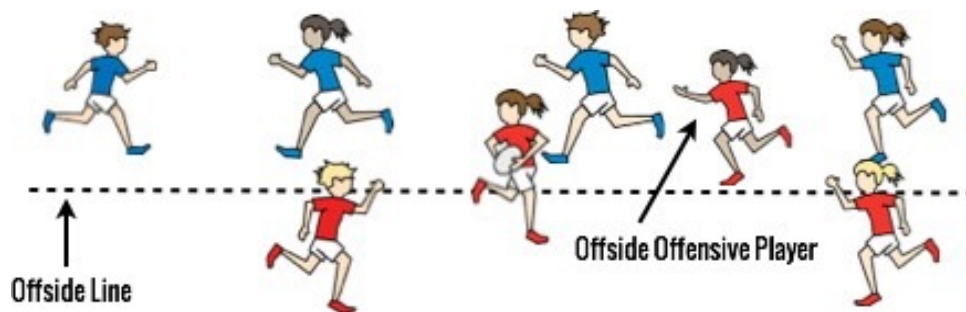
## OFFSIDES

Offside is one of the most difficult sporting concepts for players to understand. Rookie Rugby begins without an offside line as a simple way to introduce the game. Players are encouraged to take their three steps after their flag is pulled so that that create open space for passing to a support player. Support players are encouraged to always move forward.

Once players are advanced enough with the game, you can introduce an offside concept that resembles offside in rugby. It is split up into both offensive and defensive offside.

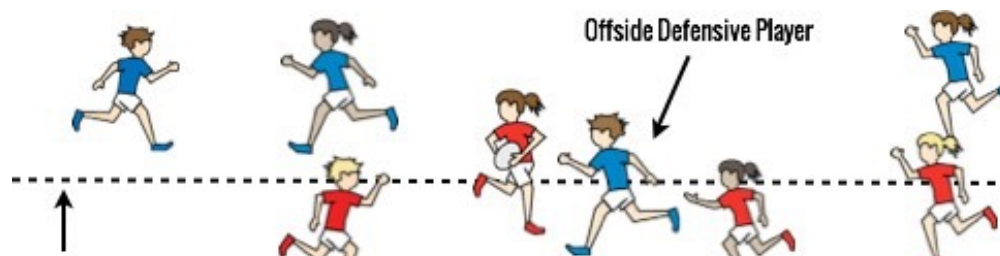
### OFFENSIVE OFFSIDE

In Rookie Rugby, passes can only be made laterally or backwards. Because of this, offside occurs when teammates are in front of the ball carrier. Keep in mind that a penalty will only occur if the offside offensive player receives a pass.



### DEFENSIVE OFFSIDE

Defensive offside is in place to ensure fairness of play. There is an imaginary line drawn through the ball once a flag is pulled which indicates where the defense must be in order to play the ball. As indicated in the image below, all defensive players must be in front of the ball and must not prevent the first pass from being made after a restart.



## KICKING

It should be noted that kicking should not be added into Rookie Rugby until the players are of the appropriate age and ability. The safety and development of players is at the forefront of the game, and the focus of the intro games is playing with the ball in hand.

In advanced versions of rugby, kicking is allowed at any time during open play, as well as for starts of the game. The following is a recommended plan for introducing kicking into the game.

There are two main types of kicking in rugby:

**Punting:** When a player kicks the ball with their foot while it is in the air

**Drop Kick:** A drop kick is a rugby-specific kick where the player will drop the ball and allow it to hit the ground and bounce up before kicking it.

## INTRODUCTION TO KICKING

**Starting the Game:** The first time to introduce kicking in Rookie Rugby is the start of the game. This allows kicking to be introduced slowly and allows all players to have the chance to practice their skills. Drop kicks can be more difficult for younger players. Start kick-offs with punting until players are ready to advance to drop kick starts.

**Kick-offs after Scoring:** Similar to the start of a game, a kick-off is used to restart play after a try is scored. After introducing kicking at the start of a game this is the next progression for kids in Rookie Rugby. After a try is scored the team that scored the try will kick-off to the opposing team.

**Kicking during Open Play:** The last progression for kicking is to add it during open play. Players will be permitted to punt the ball at any time during the game as a strategic move. It is recommended that teams are limited to the number of kicks they can perform until they are ready to strategically make kicking decisions.





# REFEREEING ROOKIE RUGBY



One of the greatest things about Rookie Rugby is how easy it is to administrate, coach, and referee. In many instances, a Rookie Rugby coach can take on the role of a referee during games. When doing so, it should be noted that referees in Rookie Rugby are more like coaches. Refereeing as a coach means using your words more than your whistle. The number one priority as a referee is maintaining the player's safety. If a player makes a mistake, let them know what they are doing wrong and why you are awarding a penalty or blowing your whistle. This will help coach the athlete so that they do not make the same mistake again.

Always keep in mind the following elements while on the field as a referee:

## SAFETY COMES FIRST

Keeping the game safe should be the top priority to the referee. Rookie Rugby players have not learned the proper techniques for contact yet, therefore the referee should be quick to discourage any unsafe actions.

Use a quick whistle for unsafe actions such as:

- Holding, pushing or shoving
- Blocking and obstructions
- Pulling the ball from the ball carrier
- Players diving on the ball or going to ground

**REMEMBER TO INSTRUCT  
PLAYERS ON WHY YOU ARE  
BLOWING THE WHISTLE!**

## COMMUNICATION

Clearly communicating is a key skill for rugby referees. Remember to help coach the players by talking with them during the game rather than always using your whistle.

- Blow your whistle only when you want to stop play
- Shout "FLAG" when a flag has been pulled
- Shout "PLAY" when you want play to resume
- Signal the team starting play after a penalty by extending your arm towards that team
- Coach / educate players on the rules
- Have a friendly attitude

## MAINTAIN SPACE

Young players will tend to bunch up during play. Establish spacing rules with the players to maintain the continuity of the game.

## ENCOURAGE CONTINUITY

Rookie Rugby is a free flowing and continuous game. Avoid blowing your whistle too many times so players begin understanding the flow of rugby.

- Use the advantage rule. Although harder to understand at first, this helps keep play flowing.

## BE IN POSITION

The key to making good calls is being in a position to see the play. Be sure to keep moving so that you can see the gameplay and ball carrier at all times.

- Be level with the play
- Call what you see
- Blow the whistle only when you want to stop play





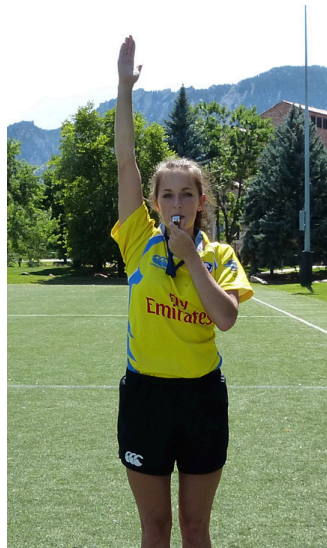
**PENALTY**



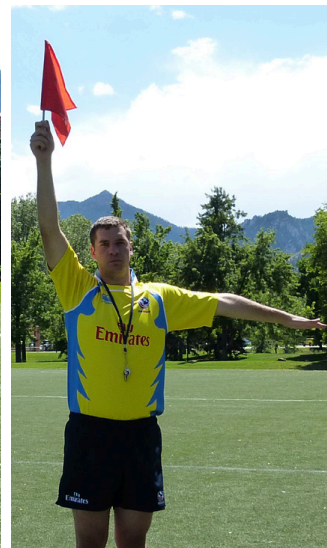
**ADVANTAGE**



**FORWARD  
PASS**



**TRY SCORED**



**LINEOUT**



**KNOCK ON**





# RUGBY RESOURCES



To learn more about youth rugby programming, please visit the following websites!



<https://rookierugby.com>

Check out this page for everything that you need related to Rookie Rugby. This side includes the Skill Cards, Game Cards and Flag Rugby Rulebook.



<https://usa.rugby>

Visit USA Rugby's official website to find out more about rugby in the US. Learn how to get involved with coaching or refereeing, keep up to date on our national teams, or even find out about a rugby event in your area!



<https://usayhsrugby.org>

USA Youth & High School Rugby is the sanctioning body for youth rugby. Visit this page to find your local club and how you can get involved in youth rugby!



<https://www.majorleague.rugby>

Visit the homepage of Major League Rugby to learn more about the highest level of rugby in North America. Find your favorite team, buy the latest merchandise, and find out how to watch your team around the world!