RUGBY AU

GAME MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES SEASON 2026

Discipline, Respect, Integrity, Passion, Teamwork.

THE 5 KEY AREAS

Rugby Australia have defined 5 KEY AREAS of the game which have greatest impact on the quality of experience for all participants. Within these areas, we highlight changes to Law or areas of focus for the 2026 Community Rugby Season. Each aspect is summarised below and detailed within the document.

Changes to law or areas of focus for the 2026 Community Rugby Season are highlighted in RED below.

1.SAFETY

TACKLE HEIGHT GLOBAL LAW TRIAL - EXTENSION
HEAD CONTACT PROCESS
CROC ROLL
BLUE CARD

2.SPEED

SPEED OF TACKLE/RUCK/MAUL
JACKLER POSITIVE ACTION
RUCK - HALF BACK "USE IT"
CONVERSION CLOCK
TIMING FOR SET-PIECE
CREATING FLOW - REWARDING MOMENTUM

3.SPACE

TACKLE, TACKLE CONTEST & RUCK OFFSIDE
KICK IN GENERAL PLAY
CLEANER PLAY AT RUCK/MAUL (PROTECTING THE #9)
KICK CHASE OBSTRUCTION
BOX KICK OFFSIDE - ATTACK/DEFENCE

4.SET-PIECE

SCRUM SET UP
DEFENSIVE #9 OFFSIDE LAW
MAUL FORMATION
FK - NO SCRUM OPTION
LINEOUT NOT STRAIGHT - CONTEST

5.INTERACTIONS

COACH/REFEREE RELATIONSHIP
CAPTAIN/REFEREE RELATIONSHIP
FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITY

OTHER

RUGBY AUSTRALIA ABUSE DIRECTIVE

The implementation of the GMG and the Game Focus Areas is the responsibility of all participants. A collaborative approach and willingness to engage in proactive discussions will allow a greater understanding of the different roles and practical implementation. This will drive a more enjoyable environment.

1.SAFETY

TACKLE HEIGHT

TACKLE HEIGHT GLOBAL LAW TRIAL

New law - 9.13

"A player must not tackle an opponent early, late or dangerous. Dangerous tackling includes, but is not limited to, tackling or attempting to tackle an opponent above the line of the sternum even if the tackle starts below the line of the sternum."

The primary aim of the Tackle Height GLT is to decrease the instances of direct head-to-head collisions and concussions.

Coaches should ensure that proper techniques are taught in both controlled and game-like training environments. Referees should enforce the laws based on the principle that violations must be "clear and obvious", otherwise they should "Play ON" and allow play to continue.

CROC ROLL

DEFINITION OF CROC ROLL:

Croc Roll: A prohibited action where a player laterally rolls/twists or pulls a player on their feet in the tackle area to the ground. The action often lands on the player's lower limbs.

PLAY ON - The arriving player pulls/pushes the jackler backwards/forward or immediately to the side.

FOUL PLAY - A cleaner pulls or rolls jackler past the point of initial contact forward (risk of dropping on limbs or hyper extension). The level of sanction is based on the danger of the action and the proximity to limbs.

PK or YC - Croc roll with a drop near or onto lower limb – Low/Medium danger

RC - Croc roll with a drop onto a lower limb or causing hyperextension of leg – High danger.

HEAD CONTACT PROCESS

FOUL PLAY	SANCTION FRAMEWORK			RC YC PK
HEAD/NECK CONTACT	DIRECT HIGH FORCE	INDIRECT HIGH FORCE DIRECT LOW FORCE	INDIRECT LOW FORCE	

IS THERE MITIGATION?

- Sudden/significant drop in height or change in direction from ball carrier
- A late change in dynamics due to another player in the contact
- An effort to wrap / bind and having no time to adjust
- Passive tackler: Feet planted, zero forward movement, falls backwards

FACTORS AGAINST MITIGATION

- Mitigation will not apply for intentional or highly reckless acts of foul play
- Line of sight and time to make a decision

Please be aware the ruck will be officiated under the Head Contact Process and not the Tackle Height Trial.

1.SAFETY

BLUE CARD

BLUE CARD PROTOCOL

In matches U13 and above, the Blue Card can be shown when a player leaves/is directed to leave the field due to signs and/or symptoms of concussion (or suspected concussion).

- Blue Card is not a diagnosis of concussion or suspected concussion.
- Blue Card is recognition that signs/symptoms of concussion (or suspected concussion) have been observed in the player.
  - May be particularly relevant following a head contact incident and/or following conversation with a team trainer etc.

- Irrespective of whether a Blue Card is shown or not - all officials (including Coach, Team Manager, Medic/Trainer etc) in all grades and formats of rugby (e.g. lower age grades, 7s, Try Tag etc) are responsible for observing, identifying and implementing the Concussion Management Procedure where signs/symptoms of concussion (or suspected concussion) are observed.

When an alternative diagnosis submission is received, Match Officials may be asked to provide a statement of facts relating to the concussion (or suspected concussion) incident. This information will be considered along with statements from other independent witnesses and/or issuer of the Referral and Return form as well as observing video footage where available.

INJURIES - GAME FLOW

GAME FLOW - REWARDING MOMENTUM

Whilst safety is paramount, it is important that we are ensuring that teams are not trying to stop or delay play to halt an opposition teams momentum.

Less Injury Stoppages:

- Look to play away from minor injuries when safe to do so.
  - The aim of this focus area is to increase game flow by reducing unnecessary stoppages. Ensuring that referee will continue to make good judgement to increase game flow without compromising player welfare.
  - Each decision should be balanced around player welfare and keeping the game moving.

SPEED

TACKLER	• Tackle Height • No impact on ball delivery - roll east/west immediately
TACKLE ASSIST	• Clear Release • Supporting body weight - players with their hands on ground to win the ball or are slowing the ball delivery should be penalised.
TACKLED PLAYER	• When tackled, the ball must be made available for play immediately. • An 'extra roll' or 'squeeze ball' from the ball carrier under pressure should be sanctioned - PK
JACKLER	• Must support body weight • Go straight ONTO THE BALL, CLEAR LIFT, POSITIVE ACTION. • A player who shows a clear lift of the ball and doesn't win possession, should still be rewarded.

Where possible, proactive management and advantage should be played to create continuity. If this is not possible, SANCTION = PK

RUCK - HALF BACK	• The referee will call "Use it!" when the ball has been clearly won by a team at the ruck, and the ball is available. • The team in possession then has 5 seconds to play the ball. DOMESTIC LAW TRIAL SANCTION- FREE KICK
CONVERSION ATTEMPTS	• Conversions to take place within 60 seconds (playing time) from the time the try is awarded, down from the original 90 seconds. • This aligns with penalty kicks at goal and is being trialled in order to improve the speed of the game.
SET PIECE TIMING	30 SECOND SET UP FOR SET-PIECE • To align with scrum set up, lineouts will now be required to be setup without delay, (Sanction: FK). • The 30 seconds begins when either referee/AR makes the mark for the lineout, or referee for scrum.
REWARDING MOMENTUM	• Referees should, where appropriate, seek to reward teams that demonstrate positive intent and encourage dominant play, both in attack and defence. • It is important to stay connected to the game, as teams under pressure may attempt to slow the game to disrupt the momentum of the attacking side.

2.SPEED

NO SCRUM OPTION FROM A FK

Law 20: OPTIONS AT A PENALTY OR FREE-KICK

Law 20.3 A team awarded a penalty ~~or a free kick~~ may instead choose a scrum
Law 20.4 a A team awarded a penalty ~~or a free kick~~ at a lineout may instead choose a lineout or a scrum at the same mark.

Law 20.4 b A team awarded a free-kick at a lineout may instead choose a lineout at the same mark.

DOMESTIC LAW TRIAL
LAW 20.4 b DOES NOT APPLY TO NOT STRAIGHT THROW FK AT LINEOUT

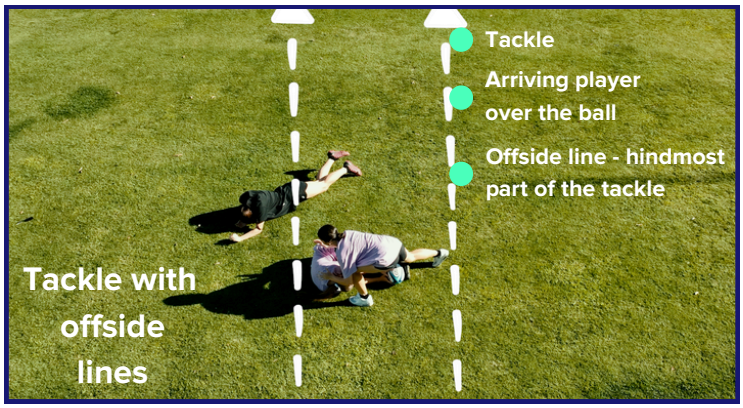
Rationale:
Speeding up restarts after technical offences. Currently many scrums result in long periods of dead time with resets, leading to more FKs, penalties and then kicks to touch. Shape of Game recommendation was to remove the scrum from a FK option.

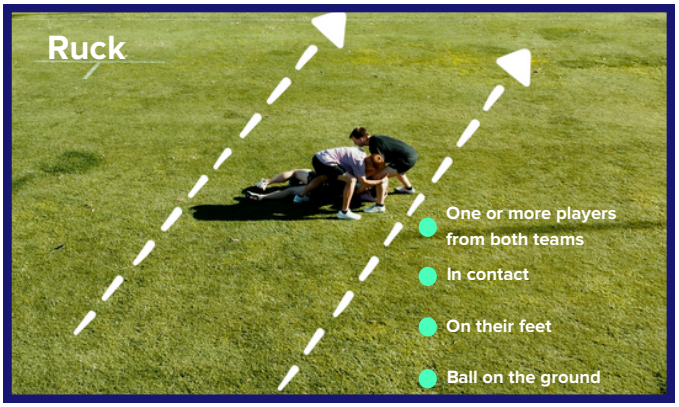
A SCRUM REMAINS AN OPTION FOR ALL PENALTY OFFENCES.

3.SPACE

TACKLE/RUCK/MAUL

- Players clearly onside.
- Players should be encouraged to provide space between hindmost part of the tackle/ruck/maul and their defensive line.
- Players must retreat if the ruck/maul's offside line shift





OFFSIDE IN FRONT OF KICKER

Rationale:

- Teams and players have previously recognised that in a kick battle with opponents, the kicking team - providing they are more than 10m away from the ball alighting - can be put onside by the actions of the catcher who runs 5m, passes or kicks.
- This has created freedom for players to loiter in the middle and wait for a kick tennis battle to conclude.
- The new wording makes clear that any player who is offside in open play needs to take action to put themselves onside and not just remain stationary. The clauses relating to the catcher running 5m and passing the ball to put an opponent onside, has been removed.

Players are liable for sanction as per the normal Offside in front of Kicker laws if they do not make an effort to retreat or continue moving towards the ball.

LAW 10.7 An Offside player can be put onside when:
10.7 Other than under Law 10.4c, an offside player can be put onside when:
a. An onside team-mate of that player moves past the offside player and is within or has re-entered the playing area.
b. An opponent of that player:
i. ~~Carries the ball five metres; or~~
~~ii. Passes the ball; or~~
i. Kicks the ball; or
ii. Intentionally touches the ball without gaining possession of it.

SANCTION - Option of a PK where player(s) were offside, or scrum where ball was kicked.

Maintaining space within the game is integral to CONTINUITY OF PLAY.
PLAYERS - Space allows time and opportunity to make better decisions.
MATCH OFFICIALS - Space creates time between each contest which provides greater opportunity for clearer decision making.

3.SPACE

KICKS IN GENERAL PLAY - OBSTRUCTION

- Players of the non kicking team must not deliberately obstruct opponents chasing a kick.
- The emphasis will be on ensuring there is space for the kicking team's chasers to have clear access to contest for possession.
- Match Officials should try and manage players to ensure they are not impeding players wanting to contest for the ball.

OFFSIDE - BOX KICKS

- ATTACK: Attacking players who are in front of the kicker at a ruck who impede/influence a charge down are liable for sanction as they are deemed offside.
- DEFENCE: Must be clearly onside and can not advance until the ball is clear of bodies.

SPACE AT RUCK & MAUL

WORLD RUGBY GLOBAL LAW TRIAL

LAW 15.8: A player who is, or was part of the ruck may not play an opponent who is near it (within 1 metre), and who is attempting to play the ball away.

LAW 16.8: A player who is, or was part of the maul may not play an opponent who is near it (within 1 metre), and who is attempting to play the ball away.

SANCTION: PENALTY

4.SET PIECE

SCRUM

CROUCH

Stability
Square
Height
Brake Foot

BIND

Balance-FK
Space on bind-FK
Brake Foot-FK
Stability-FK

SET

Hit and hold-FK
Feed to hook-FK
No delay feed-FK

POST FEED CONTEST

Push straight - to be rewarded, a team needs to push straight and through the mark. Note - a team going backwards while staying square should not be penalised.

Tight Head - bind on the body, not on the arm. Loose Head - elbow pointing to the sideline. Note - these are not penalisable offences if the scrum is stable but will be considered if the scrum collapses.

Defensive Scrum Half - Is not permitted past the mid-line of the scrum. Defend at the mid-line (within 1m), at the hindmost foot (#8), or 5m back (with the backline).

FK - NO SCRUM OPTION ALLOWED. PLAYERS NEED TO TAP OR KICK

LINEOUT AND MAUL

SET UP

Hooker on the mark
Gap - 1m
Receiver and non-throwing hooker (2x2m)
No Walk-ins (clear stop)
SANCTION -FK

CONTEST

Contested throw = inside shoulder
Non-contested throw = above head
SANCTION- FK
No throwing player across -PK
No playing a player in the air-PK

MAUL

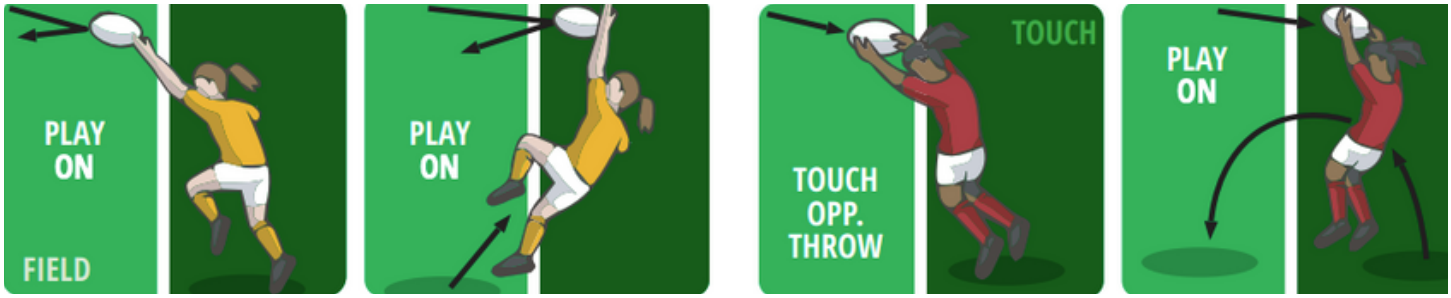
DEFENCE
No Early Drive -PK
No sacking lifter-PK
Side Entry/Collapse-PK
ATTACK
Lifters Obstructing-PK
Ripper in contact with jumper - no slide back-PK

- Where a defensive infringement has occurred, proactive management and advantage should be played to create continuity. If this is not possible, sanction appropriately.
- An attacking infringement should be penalised immediately to avoid confusion.

FK - NO SCRUM OR LINEOUT OPTION ALLOWED FROM A NOT STRAIGHT THROW. PLAYERS NEED TO TAP OR KICK.

ALL OTHER FK SANCTIONS AT LINEOUT (SET UP), A LINEOUT IS AN OPTION AS PER LAW 20.4ii

TOUCH LAW



LINEOUT

Not Straight Lineout = PLAY ON (If no contest)

WORLD RUGBY GLOBAL LAW TRIAL

If a lineout isn't straight, and if the defending team are not lifted to compete for the ball, then play shall continue.

Rationale - removes an unnecessary stoppage and scrum when no material effect on non-throwing team.

Practical Implementation:

- **A jumper needs to be lifted (by 1 or 2 lifters) to compete for the ball.**
- **If the ball is thrown not straight to the back and there is a lift at the front, it is not straight as there is a contest from the opposition.**
- **The throw must still be attempted to be thrown straight to a player in the lineout - deliberately throwing the ball not straight is not allowed and liable for sanction.**
- **Quick/short throws to the front player and throws beyond 15m still need to be straight, regardless of contest.**
- **If the defending team lift a teammate to compete for the ball, and the ball is not straight = Sanction: Free Kick.**

DOMESTIC LAW TRIAL

SANCTION: FREE KICK (TAP OR KICK OPTION ONLY) ON THE 15M LINE ALONG THE LINE OF TOUCH.

5.INTERACTIONS

PRE MATCH

It is highly recommended that match officials, coaches and players engage in dialogue pre-game to set all parties up for success. Reasons for this;

- Front row chat
- Captain and Referee to establish working relationship.
- Provide clarity in Law
- Provide understanding of how the team may want to play and allow the referee the opportunity to facilitate this within the Laws.

Proactive and meaningful discussion will see greater clarity and better working relationships between all participants.

DURING MATCH

2026 will see a firmer on-field stance to;

- back chat
- protesting decisions
- non-sportsperson like conduct amongst players.

Referees will be encouraged to manage each scenario with context but have the following management tools at their disposal depending on severity.

- Ensure your ground has a ground marshal and use them if required.
- Warning - quiet word with player or captain
- PK
- PK & YC - repeat behaviour or severity
- RC - abuse, discrimination etc.

PLEASE NOTE:

Any additional person who fails to adhere to the Laws may be cautioned or sent off and misconduct charges may be issued by the Match organiser.

- Referees should manage any situation involving additional person(s) (official team personel i.e. 2x water carriers, 2x medical and any coaches or managers located within the playing enclosure) as per the above protocol.

POST MATCH

Referees are not to be approached immediately after the match for comment on the game. Please allow at least 15 minutes before any discussion takes place.

2026 will see all competitions given the ability to provide post match feedback via a formal link provided by the competition.

The feedback will be aligned to the 5 Key Areas outlined in this document.

The purpose;

- feedback opportunity
- development opportunity
- build better relationships between coaches, players and referees.

6.OTHER

INTEGRITY

ABUSE DIRECTIVE - TO BE INCLUDED ONCE FINALISED (PRIOR TO 2026 SEASON)

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Mitch De Lorenzo - Match Official Manager - Education
Andrew Gilchrist - Match Official Manager - Workforce
Drew Crozier - Match Official Manager - Developing States
Brendan McKibbin - Match Official Performance Manager
Pete Garden - Competitions Manager
Tom Halliday - Head of Game Development