

# Junior/Youth TAG Rugby Rules



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# Junior/Youth TAG Rugby Rules

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# Introduction

## Why Play TAG Rugby?

TAG Rugby has the following advantages over traditional games of touch rugby:

- ✓ It shows clearly when a tackle is made and prevents arguments
- ✓ It allows players to easily officiate their own games
- ✓ It gives a real incentive for defenders to defend
- ✓ It momentarily takes the 'tackler' out of the game as would happen in full contact rugby, allowing more time and space for the attacking team
- ✓ It encourages the correct lines of running required for success in the full 15-a-side game
- ✓ Most importantly TAG Rugby is a fun game that all the family can play

TAG Rugby can be played without scrums and lineouts and teams can be as small as 4 or 5 a-side. It can be played on grass, sand or on hard surfaces. There is no need for rugby posts and the pitch can be marked as a simple rectangle. Teachers, coaches and players need no previous knowledge of rugby to get started and this makes TAG Rugby an ideal game for girls and boys of all ages and abilities.

## How should a tag belt be worn?

All players wear a tag belt around the waist and on the outside of the clothing. Shirts should be tucked in at all times. The ribbons (tags) must be positioned on either side of the hips and the teams are distinguished by the colour of ribbons they wear. Colours should be chosen so that they stand out against the players' strip, e.g. teams with blue shorts should not use blue ribbons. Belts should be firmly fastened to avoid unnecessary movement during a 'tag', with any surplus length of belt being tucked securely out of the way for safety.

- *RFU recommended dimensions for the ribbons (tags) are: 38 cms long by 5 cms wide, give or take a few millimetres.*

## Object of the Game

To score a try by placing the ball, with downward pressure, on or behind the opponents' goal line.

For simplicity's sake, a try is worth one point.

**Note:**

- *To ensure safe practice when playing on hard surfaces, or in restricted areas, a try can be scored by the ball carrier merely running over the goal line with the ball.*

**Number of Players**

This is flexible. However, it is suggested that teams between 5 and 7 a-side help to encourage maximum involvement and activity. The majority of TAG Rugby festivals are played with 7 a-side teams. When playing mixed games teams usually include a minimum of 3 players of the opposite sex.

Rolling substitutions can be made when there is a stoppage in play (eg at a free pass) or at half time, provided the referee is informed. Each side can have an agreed number of substitutes.

**Duration of play**

For 7 a-side games two halves of seven minutes each way are played with 2 minutes for half time. At festivals for young players it is suggested 10 minute games with no half time avoids confusion and saves time.

**Size of ball**

**Key Stage 2** = Size 3 (*under 10's & younger*)

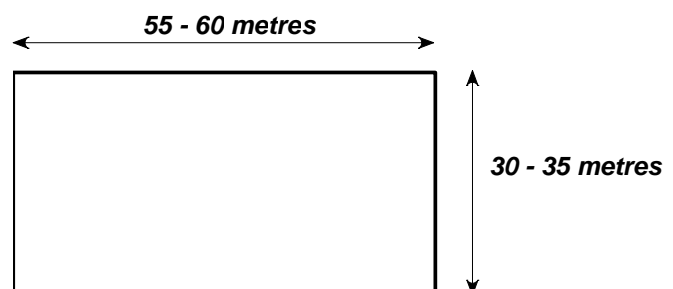
**Key Stage 3** = Size 4 (*U11's, U12's, U13's & U14's*)

**Key Stage 4** = Size 5 (*U15's & older*)

**Size of pitch**

7 a-side games can be played across half a normal sized rugby/soccer pitch (55-60m x 30-35m).

*Recommended pitch dimensions for 7 a-side games.*

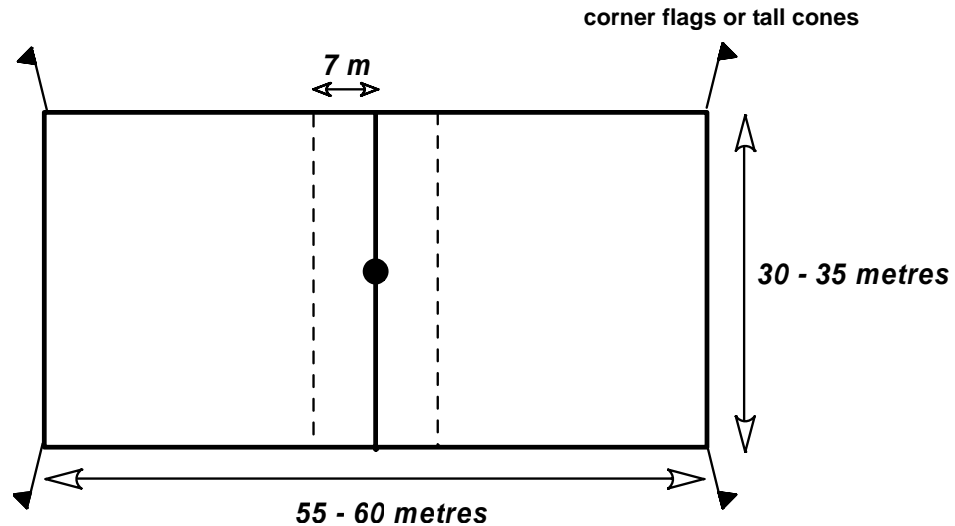


Four games of 4 or 5 a-side can be played on a typical school rugby/soccer pitch using dimensions of 30-35m x 15-20m.

**Pitch markings**

TAG Rugby can be played by marking out a basic rectangle. However, for festivals and competitive matches, the following markings can prove helpful.

*Recommended TAG Rugby markings for festivals/competitive games.*



*Note:*

- *Goalposts are not required to play TAG Rugby. However, by placing corner flags or tall cones in the four corners of the pitch it will help players to immediately orientate themselves in the heat and excitement of a game situation.*
- *A dead ball line can also be included for more experienced players but, without goalposts, can prove confusing for inexperienced players.*

## The five basic rules for TAG Rugby

### Rule 1- Method of scoring

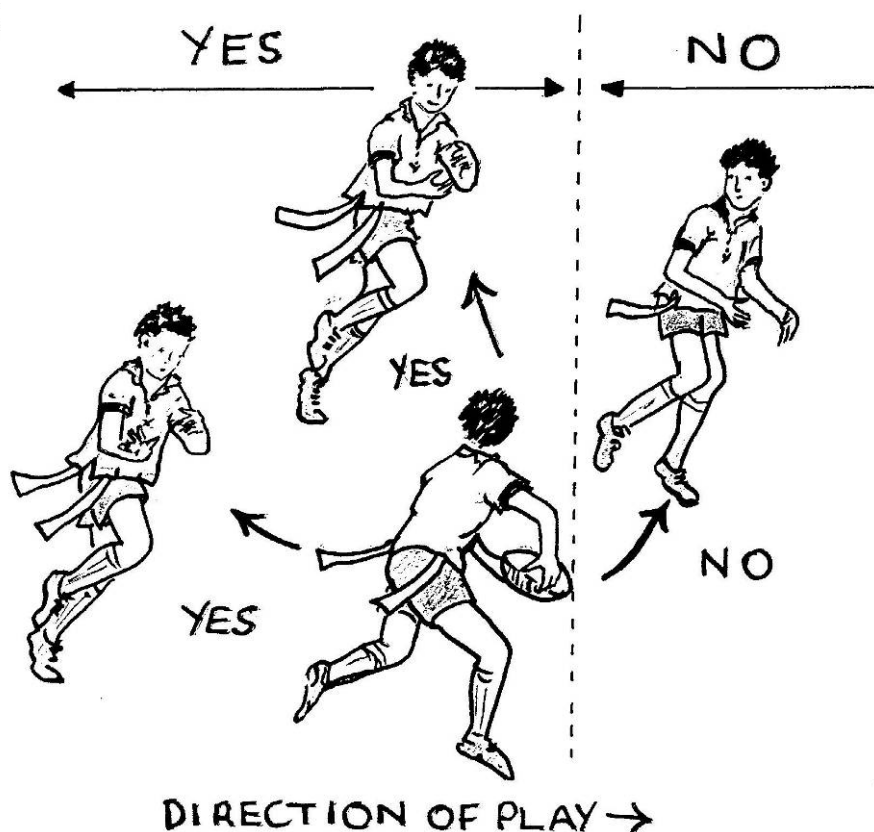
A try is worth one point (*see also 'Rule F' p7*). To score a try a player must carry the ball over the opponents' goal line and press the ball down on the ground. (To ensure safe practice there is no diving allowed to score a try) When playing on hard surfaces, or in restricted areas, a try can be scored by the ball carrier merely running over the goal line with the ball. After a try is scored the game restarts from the centre of the field with a free pass by the non-scoring team. (*See Rule 4, 'The Free Pass'*)

### Rule 2- Passing

No forward passes are allowed and will be penalised by a free pass being awarded to the non-offending team at the place the ball left the player's hands. A forward pass is any pass where the ball travels in the direction of the opponents' goal line. (Perhaps, with real beginners, passing in any direction could be used as an initial introduction to rugby)

*Note: A pass directly sideways is allowed and in fact can be the most effective pass players make, as no ground is lost with this type of pass.*

### THE NO FORWARD PASS RULE



### **Rule 3 -The 'Tackle' (Tag)**

Only the player with the ball can be tagged and a tag is simply the removal by a defender of one of the two ribbons from the ball carrier. Ball carriers can run or dodge potential taggers but cannot fend them off, spin around or guard or shield their ribbons in any way. This includes using the ball and elbows to fend away defenders.

The defender then holds the ribbon above their head and shouts 'tag' for all to hear. Defenders must back off at least one metre from the ball carrier, allowing space for them to pass. They are not allowed to snatch the ball from the player's hand.

*Note: When playing with a referee, it is helpful to players if the referee shouts "tag, pass" as a tag is made.*

Once tagged, the player in possession of the ball must attempt to stop as soon as possible and pass the ball within 3 seconds of being tagged (real beginners could be given longer). Even at full pace, the ball carrier will be expected to stop in 3 strides.

Near the goal line, players are only allowed one step to score after being tagged. If their momentum means they have taken 2 or 3, then they must pass to a team-mate to score, even if they are now over the goal line.

*Note: Players can pass in the act of stopping.*

After a tag has been made, both the ball carrier and the defender are momentarily out of the game. The defender can take no further part until they have handed back the ribbon to the attacker (not thrown it on the floor) and the attacker no further part, until they have replaced their ribbon back on their belt.

*Note: The defender hands back the ribbon only after the attacker has passed the ball. This action simulates the time taken up by defenders when tackling in full contact rugby and stops defenders being unrealistically active as can happen in traditional games of touch rugby.*

**Remember - There should be no tags on the floor at any time.**

Very occasionally, a ball carrier may accidentally flick off one of their own ribbons in the act of running, making it very difficult for a defender to tag them. In this case the game should be stopped and the player allowed to replace it. The game then restarts with a free pass to the team in possession at the place where the ribbon came off.

**Rule 4 - The Free Pass**

A free pass is used to start the game (from the centre of the field) or to restart it at the place where the ball went out of play or an infringement took place.

*Note: If an infringement takes place over the goal line, or within 5 metres of the goal line, then a free pass should be awarded to the non-offending team, 5 metres out from the goal line to create some space.*

At a free pass the ball is held in two hands and on the instruction "play" given by the referee the player passes the ball to a team-mate. More experienced players can be made to tap it with their foot first before passing, as they do when taking a tap penalty in full contact rugby. When playing without a referee, the opposing team captain gives the instruction to "play".

*Note: It is the referee (or the opposing team captain when playing without a referee) who dictates when a free pass is taken by saying, "play". Players cannot take a quick free pass in TAG Rugby, instead referees must allow sufficient time for defenders to get back before restarting the game.*

The player making the free pass must start play with a pass; they are not allowed to run with it themselves.

The opposition cannot start moving forward until the player has actually passed the ball.

At a free pass, the opposition must be 7 metres (7 large steps) back. More experienced players may prefer 10 metres.

For safety reasons, at a free pass the receiver of the pass must not start from more than 2 metres back from the free pass mark. This avoids the potentially dangerous 'crash ball' move.

**Rule 5- Ball out of play**

If the ball or ball carrier goes out of play a free pass is given to the other team from the sideline.

These are the five basic rules of TAG Rugby. Youngsters who understand these can play a simple version of the game. As players gain in experience, and their skill levels and understanding of the game develop, the following rules can be gradually introduced at the discretion of the teacher or coach.



## Further rules for beginners

### A. Knock-ons

A knock-on occurs when the player attempting to catch the ball fumbles it and knocks it forward to the ground in the direction of the opponents' goal

*Note: The ball must touch the players' hands or arms **and** the ground for a knock-on to occur, so if a player fumbles a pass but manages to catch it before it hits the ground, play should continue.*



### B. Off-side

This rule can be introduced at an early stage to allow some flow to the game and develop good habits for the future. Off-side **only** occurs immediately after a tag has been made and it is **only** those defenders who are off-side **and** interfering with the game that need to be penalised.

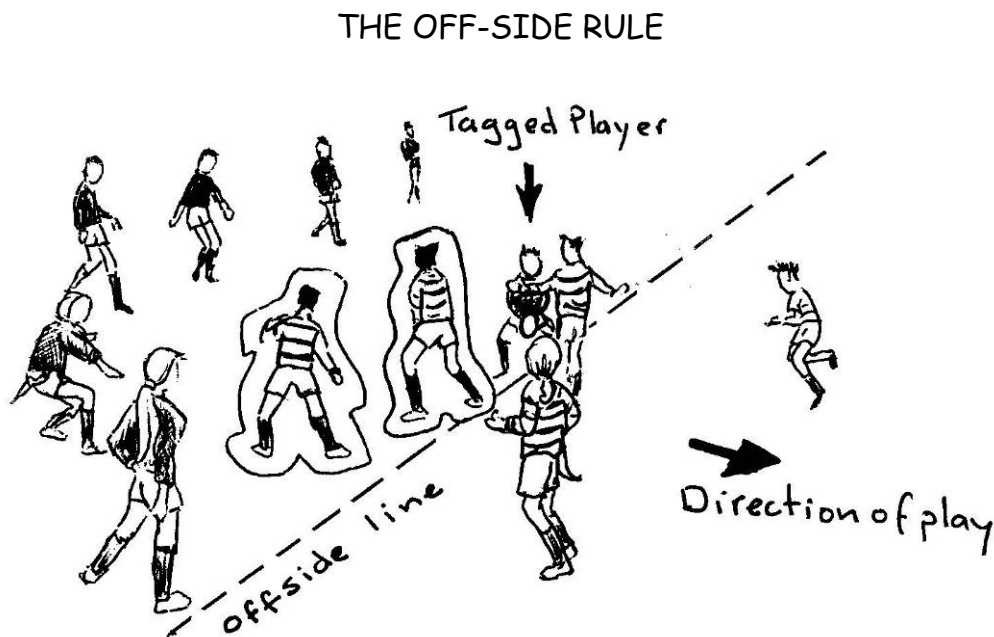
In simple terms, once a tag has been made all defenders should make an effort to get back on their side of the ball and not deliberately stand in an off-side position, blocking the pass, marking up support players or waiting for an interception. Off-side is penalised by awarding a free pass to the non-offending team.

*Note: Where defenders find themselves in an off-side position at a 'tag', they should be encouraged to get back on-side as quickly as possible, or clearly indicate they have no intention of interfering with play by either ducking right down, or by putting both arms straight above their head and getting out of the way. They must not block, intercept or interfere with the pass in any way.*

Once the pass has been made and play continues there is no off-side in the game until the next ball carrier is tagged.

*Note: Where defenders are off-side but not interfering with play then nobody needs to be penalised and the game should be allowed to continue.*

*It tends to be the defenders standing off-side and within 3 metres of the ball carrier that need penalising the most. For example the two defenders outlined in the diagram below.*



### C. The Advantage rule

As players become familiar with the rules, teachers and coaches should be encouraged to introduce the 'advantage' rule to create quick reactions and fewer stoppages in the game. The advantage rule states that if an infringement has occurred, the referee should not whistle immediately but wait to see if the opposition gain a territorial or tactical advantage from it. If they clearly do, then play should be allowed to continue. However, if the non-offending team does not in fact gain an advantage, the referee shall whistle and bring play back to the place of the original infringement and award a free pass to the non-offending team.

### D. Number of Tags ('tackles')

It is suggested with real beginners that there are no set number of tags. However, once skill levels have developed, the team in possession of the ball could be given a set number of consecutive tags to score a try. This rewards good defence and encourages players to pass to support players before being tagged. Failure to score after this set number of tags results in a 'turnover', with the opposition gaining a free pass at the place the last

tag took place. Experience has shown that 4 or 5 consecutive 'tags' is a good number for young players to use; more able players could be given less. *Note: Referees or the defending team captain could call out the number of tags when players are tagged e.g. "tag one, pass" ..... "tag two, pass" etc.*

For a tag to count, the ball must still be in the hands of the ball carrier at the moment the tag is made. If a defender removes a ribbon **after** the ball carrier has passed the ball (*a 'phantom tag'*) the tag should not be counted.

After a free pass has been awarded, the number of tags starts back to zero. This is a good incentive for the team not in possession of the ball not to deliberately infringe.

#### **E. Carry the ball in two hands**

To encourage good habits and assist with refereeing, players **must** carry the ball in two hands at all times. Failure to do so will result in a free pass being awarded to the non-offending team.

Carrying the ball in two hands will encourage players to look for the passing option more readily and will stop them from using their free hand to fend off or interfere with a defender attempting to make a tag.

#### **F. Two points for a female try**

At the discretion of the teach/coach or festival organizers the rule to award two points if a female scores a try could be implemented in mixed games. Experience has shown that introducing this rule can often encourage players to start passing the ball more often and fully involve all their team members. It will award teams that do play as a team.

However, a male player cannot pass the ball to a female to score **after** they have crossed the try line (goal line) to gain this extra point. Neither can he run back into the field of play in order to pass to a female to score. If tries are scored in this manner then they will be worth just the one point.

## Things to avoid

**No contact** -strictly no contact or grabbing a player's clothing.

**No kicking** - no kicking is allowed in TAG Rugby.

**No hand-offs**- no hand-offs on the body or face or to swipe a defender's hand away to stop them taking your ribbons. This includes using the ball or elbows to fend off defenders.

**No diving on the ball**- for safety players are not allowed to dive on a loose ball but instead must remain on their feet to play it.

**No spinning/jumping**- ball carriers are not allowed to deliberately spin around or jump to avoid being tagged.

**No deliberate barging into defenders**- for safety, the ball carrier and the defender should attempt to avoid contact with each other at all times.

**No diving to score a try**- TAG Rugby is often played during the summer months on hard grounds. For safety, and to minimise contact, players are not allowed to dive to score.

**No pulling the ball out of the ball carrier's hands** - at any time.

Whenever the TAG Rugby rules are broken, a free pass is awarded to the other team at the place the infringement took place and the number of tags (if playing Rule D) start back to zero. If the infringement took place over the goal line, or within 5 metres of it, the free pass is awarded 5 metres out from the goal line to create some space.

*Note:*

- *At the discretion of the teacher or coach, TAG Rugby can be developed with more experienced players to involve line-outs, scrums and kicking.*

## Summary of the major rules of Junior/Youth TAG Rugby

- Teams are usually made up of 7 players. For mixed games the rule is usually that each team contains a minimum of 3 players of the opposite sex.
- Games are made up of two halves of 7 minutes each with a break of 2 minutes for half time. For festivals, games of 10 minute duration with no half time help avoid confusion for young players and saves time.
- One point is awarded for a try, (*Rule 1 - Method of scoring*)  
Two if scored by a female if playing Rule F.
- To stop the ball carrier, defenders must remove one of the two ribbons and shout "*Tagged*". The attacker must then stop and pass immediately (maximum of 3 seconds/3 steps). (*Rule 3 - The 'Tackle'*)
- If playing with a referee, it would be helpful to players if referees shout "*tag one,... pass, tag two,... pass*" etc when a tag is made. (*Rule D - Number of Tags*)
- Defenders must allow room for the ball carrier to pass after they have been tagged. (*Rule 3 - The 'Tackle'*)
- After a tag has been made, both the ball carrier and the defender cannot take any further part in the game until the defender has handed back the ribbon to the attacker (not thrown it on the floor) and the attacker has replaced this ribbon back on their belt.  
(*Rule 3 - The 'Tackle'*)
- Both the ball carrier and defenders **must** avoid contact with each other at all times. The ball carrier cannot deliberately charge into defenders and defenders cannot deliberately move into the ball carriers path impeding the progress of the ball carrier (similar to a defensive foul in basketball).  
(*Rule 3 - The 'Tackle'*)
- No player can participate in the game without both ribbons being correctly in place.
- The ball carrier must carry the ball in two hands at all time. (*Rule E*)

- If an attacking team has not scored by the allocated number of tags (4 or 5 is usually played with young players) on the last tag there is a turn over of possession, and play is restarted with a free pass being awarded to the defending team. *(Rule D - The Number of Tags)*
- Ball carriers are not allowed to jump or spin around to avoid being tagged or use their elbows or the ball to fend off defenders.
- A free pass restarts all stoppages of play. At a free pass, the opposition is given time to get back 7 metres, and it is always the referee, (or opposition captain if there is no referee) who restarts the game by calling out "*play*". No quick free passes are allowed and the player making a free pass must pass the ball first. They are not allowed to run themselves. *(Rule 4 - Free Pass)*
- Off-side **only** occurs immediately after a tag has been made. All defenders who are in front of the ball at a 'tag' are off-side. However, only those who are offside **and interfering** with play ever need penalising. *(Rule B - Off-side)*
- Near the goal line, players are only allowed one step to score after being tagged *(Rule 3 - The Tackle)*
- Except where safety is an issue, play advantageous wherever possible and allow the game to flow. *(Rule C)*
- Whenever the TAG Rugby rules are broken, a free pass is awarded to the other team at the place the infringement took place and the number of tags (if playing Rule D) start back to zero. If the infringement took place over the goal line, or within 5 metres of it, the free pass is awarded 5 metres out from the goal line to create some space.
- Always encourage players to play by the rules, accept the referees' decision, display good sportsmanship and never ridicule or shout at a player for making a mistake.