Rugby is a sport, a passion, a disease you catch. They'll tell you it's a cross between soccer and football, but that doesn't REALLY prepare you. Rugby is its own backasswards self. There is NOTHING like it on or off the field. Some sports historians put forth the theory that in the olden days it was considered amusement for one town to try and carry a somewhat startled young pig to another town's village square. They would employ various methods of dodging, dashing, passing, or just plowing through en masse to achieve this. These primitive contests became refined over time and emerged as rugby, soccer, football, etc. To the casual observer, rugby seems remarkably close to its roots.
William Webb-Ellis - the father of modern rugby union?

Modern rugby union as we love it today can trace its roots back to 1823 in Warwickshire.

The traditional story credits William Webb Ellis with inventing the modern day game at Rugby School in Warwickshire (picture of Webb Ellis or tableau at Rugby School).

Many schools at that time played a game similar to rugby and football, which had few rules.

And it was during one of these games that Webb Ellis decided to "cheat".

Quite simply, he picked the ball up and ran with it in his hands.

Some people have argued whether the Webb Ellis story ever happened, but it is still the most widely accepted version of how the modern game came to be.

Formation of Rugby Football Union

But on 26 January 1871, representatives from clubs across the country met to form the Rugby Football Union, the sport's governing body, to draw up a common code of laws.

Soon after the RFU was formed, the first rugby international was played between England and Scotland in Edinburgh on 27 March.
The basics of rugby union

Rugby union is played by two teams of 15 players.

Rugby is played on a field that we call the PITCH.
The Pitch

Rugby is played on a grass field, although sand and clay are permitted, provided they are not dangerous. A permanently hard surface, such as asphalt and cement, is prohibited. The place where rugby is played is variously referred to as the field of play, the playing field, the rugby field and the pitch, but they all mean the same — the battlefield, which is shown in Figure 1.

The players do battle in the following areas:

**The field of play:** The area that is in the centre of the ground is the *field of play*, which measures no more than 100 meters long by no more than 70 meters wide.

**The playing area:** Encompassing the *in-goal* areas as well as the field of play is the *playing area*. The playing area is defined by posts flying flags; the posts are at least 1.2 meters in height.

**The in-goal areas:** At each end of the playing area are the *in-goal* areas, which must be between 10 and 22 meters in length and 70 meters in width.

The playing area has numerous lines marked on it, of which the most important are the following:

**10 meter line:** Two 10 meter lines are marked on the field of play, which are situated 10 meters either side of the *halfway line*. When a team kicks off, the ball must cross this line for play to continue — in other words, the ball must be kicked at least 10 meters towards the opposing team to allow play to start. If the ball does not travel 10 meters, a *scrum* is formed in the middle of the field, with the non-offending team getting the *scrum feed* or *put-in*. 
The Pitch

22 meter line: The field of play has two lines 22 meters out from each tryline. Goal kickers attempt to take conversions near these lines.

Dead ball line: The line beyond the in-goal area at each end of the field is called the dead ball line. Once the ball goes over this line it is out of play.

Halfway line: The halfway line marks the centre of the field and is where the game starts. The game is also restarted at the halfway line after successful tries or penalty goals.

Sideline: The two lines marked along the length of the field are called the sidelines. A ball is described as going into touch when it crosses either sideline and goes out of the field of play. The sideline is also called the touch line.

Touch line: The touch line is the same line as the sideline.

Goal-line (Tryline): The line at either end of the field of play which a player must cross for his team to successfully score a try is called a tryline.

Finally, the target, the goalposts. Goalposts are situated at each end of the playing area and must be 5.6 meters apart with a crossbar, the transverse bar between the goalposts that’s three meters from the ground. The minimum height of the goalposts is 3.4 meters. As a safety precaution, the goalposts are usually covered with padding to stop players suffering serious injury if they crash into them.
AIM OF THE GAME

The aim of the game is very simple - use the ball to score more points than the other team. You can run with the ball, kick it and pass it, but passing forwards is not allowed.

Rugby union is a contact sport, so you can tackle an opponent in order to get the ball, as long as you stay within the rules.

There is a referee, aided by two touch judges (one on each side of the pitch), to decide how the rules should be applied during a game.

There are several ways to score points.

• A try - five points are awarded for touching the ball down in your opponent’s goal area.
• A conversion - two points are added for a successful kick through the goalposts after a try.
• A goal kick - three points are awarded for a penalty kick or drop goal through the posts.

If both teams score the same amount of points, or no points are scored, then the match is a draw. In some cases, extra time is played to decide who wins.
DURATION
A game of rugby union has two periods of 40 minutes each. In international matches the referee will stop the clock for stoppages. Between the two halves, there is a maximum 10-minute interval, after which both teams change ends.

The referee's whistle indicates the start and finish of the half. Extra time will only be played if it's a knockout competition.
KICK-OFF
Before the start of the match, the referee tosses a coin to decide which team will kick off the match.
The captain of the team that wins the toss gets to decide which end he wants to attack first, or whether his side or the opposition will kick off.
The game is started by a place kick or a drop kick from the middle of the halfway line.
The ball must travel forwards at least 10 meters from the kick-off. If it does not, the opposition get the choice of a scrum or line-out on the halfway line, with the advantage of the feed or throw.
If a penalty or drop goal is scored during the game, play is restarted with a drop kick from the halfway line. The team that has conceded the points takes the kick.
THE BALL

Rugby union is played with an oval-shaped ball.

All balls must be between 28cm and 30cm in length (approximately 11-13 inches).

Most full-size balls weigh between 383 and 440 grammes (approximately 13.5-15.5 ounces)
The beauty of rugby union is that it is a game for people of all shapes and all sizes. Traditionally, forwards tended to be larger and less mobile, while backs were smaller and faster. However, rugby has changed and players of shapes and sizes are playing in different positions to what their body types. Whether you are short and stocky or tall and thin, there's a place for you in a rugby side.

A loosehead prop is one of the three players at the front of the scrum. They stand on the left-hand side of the hooker. As they take most of the impact in the scrum, a prop should have plenty of strength in their upper body. This is the area of the body where all the power is created for the big push.
The positions on the rugby pitch

Out of all the eight forwards, the hooker is the one player with the most responsibility. They have two very important roles to play. Their first duty is to hook the ball for the scrum-half to collect in the scrum. And their second is to throw the ball in at the line-outs for the jumpers to catch. This is often done under intense pressure - so hookers need plenty of nerve and confidence. Like props, hookers need to have a strong back and neck, as well as powerful arms and legs. But they need to be that bit more flexible than their fellow front row mates because they are the ones who hook the ball in the scrum. Hookers are often the smallest member of the forwards, but that doesn't mean they are the least important.

A tighthead prop is one of the three players at the front of the scrum. They stand on the right-hand side of the hooker. As they take most of the impact in the scrum, a prop should have plenty of strength in their upper body. This is the area of the body where all the power is created for the big push. Props also tend to get stuck into tackles and often they can be found at the bottom of a ruck or the middle of a maul.
The positions on the rugby pitch

Most second rowers or locks are tall and powerful. As well as providing power for the big push in the scrum, the second row are the targets in the line-out. Their job is to catch the hooker’s throw and get the ball to the scrum-half. Modern-day second rows need to be mobile around the park to carry the ball and to make tackles.

The blindside flanker tends to be bigger than their team-mate, the openside flanker.
They have a more physical role and are often a target for the hooker in the line-out. They get through a large amount of tackles and are often regarded as the “invisible” player because of the work they get through.

The modern-day flanker is an all-round athlete, combing speed, power and skill into one position. The openside flanker is usually a slightly different build from their partner, the blindside flanker. They are smaller in size, making them more mobile around the pitch. One of their main roles is to win ball from the opposition, which means battling for possession at rucks and breakdowns. The openside flanker will often be the player with the responsibility to mark the other side’s fly-half. They do this by quickly closing them down, reducing the time they have to kick or pass. Because of their high tackle count, flankers are always involved in rucks or mauls either at the bottom or making the big drives.
The positions on the rugby pitch

The number 8 is the player who controls the ball at the back of the scrum. They have a similar role to the flanker in terms of getting through the hard work of tackling, rucking and mauling. Number eights need to have explosive pace and power, especially when the scrums are near the opposition’s tryline. They are also a potential target for the hooker in the line-out.

The scrum-half is the link between the backs and the forwards - the players who get things going in defense and attack. They collect the ball from scrums and line outs from the forwards to provide possession for the backs. They also marshal the forwards during rucks and mauls to gain valuable territory. Scrum-halves need to be accurate passers as well as fast decision makers in tight situations.

The fly-half is probably the most influential player on the pitch as they are the brains of the whole team. They are the players who make the big decisions under pressure - to run with the ball or kick for territory. So it goes without saying fly-halves need excellent handling skills and a confident kicking game. But as well as attacking instincts, the fly-half also needs to have a solid defensive game.
The positions on the rugby pitch

Often the fastest runners on the team are to be found on the wing. Their main responsibility is to finish off the attacking moves created by their fellow backs and score tries. Sidesteps, swerves and dummy passes - as well as a change of pace - are the main skills wingers use to evade the tacklers. However, they also need to have the all-round skills of a full-back as often they can find themselves the last line of defense as well as the first point of attack.

The inside centre is one of those players who is always involved, whether in defense or attack. They offer options for the fly-half in attack, making the breaks and drawing the opposition's defense to make the space for their partner, the outside centre. And the inside centres are also the players tackling in defense along with the forwards. Accurate handling and passing skills are a must for any centre, along with a good kicking game. Expect to get through plenty of running.

The outside centre is the player who exploits the gaps in the opposition's defense. They often hit the holes in the opposition's defense, making valuable ground and offloading to the wingers after drawing the last line of defense. They also need a sturdy defensive game, like their partner the inside centre. Accurate handling and passing skills are a must for any centre, along with a good kicking game.
The modern-day full-back should be the complete rugby player.
The number 15 is often the last line of defense or the first player making the break in attack. Full-backs need a safe pair of hands because they are the player responsible for catching the opposition's high and testing kicks in attack. Expect to perform under pressure when the going gets seriously tough. If you can suddenly turn defense into attack, make those important last-ditch tackles and make the extra man in attack, look no further than the full-back.
The laws of scrummaging

Two packs of players, straining every muscle for every inch of opposition territory they can claim.

Of course, it's the scrum. It is used for restarting play after the following:

- The ball has been knocked on
- The ball has gone forward
- Accidental offside
- The ball has not come out from a ruck or maul

Not every player can join a scrum. Only eight players from each team can take part. They are almost always the eight forwards in the side. The scrum is formed at the place where the infringement happened. All scrums must take place at least five meters from the touch or trylines. However the scrum is one of the hardest areas of the game to referee because of the many infringements, particularly in the front row.
BINDING
Referees pay particular attention to the bindings of the two front rows. Props must use the whole arm from hand to shoulder to grasp their opponent's body at or below the level of the armpit. They must grasp their opposite number's shirt from the side or the back. They cannot go underneath and grab the collar or the sleeve of the upper arm. Props often look for a late bind when they engage. By maneuvering their arm they can manipulate their opponent's body position, giving them a significant advantage in the push. However referees are stringent on this move because of safety reasons. Twisting, dipping or collapsing a scrum will result in a penalty against the offending team.

FRONT ROW OFFENCES
Rather than engaging square on with their opponent, tight-head props can bore their heads into the hooker. This limits the movement of the opposition hooker. Sometimes you may see a tight-head prop's body pop out of a scrum while it is still taking place. This is because their opposing loose-head prop has used a subtle shift of body position and pushed into the tight-head prop's chest. Both moves are illegal and are punishable with penalties.
Forming a scrum

The eight forwards are the players who form the scrum. The hooker, two props, two second rows, two flankers and the number eight all bind together in a 3-4-1 formation, ready to lock heads with the opposition.

- **The hooker.** A key player in the scrum - their job is to hook the ball back towards the waiting scrum-half.

- **Two props.** They make the hooker's life easier. They bind on tightly on both sides of the hooker, leaving no gaps between them, and try to drive the opposition back. The prop to the left of the hooker is called the loose-head because they have one arm free when they bind. The prop to the right is called the tight-head because they slot in between the hooker and the opposition loose-head.

- **Two second row forwards.** They bind tightly together and pack down behind the front row, putting their heads in the gaps between the hooker and the props.

- **Two flankers.** Bind on to both the props and second rows on either side of the scrum.

- **Number 8.** They pack down behind the second row forwards, putting their head between the two second rows.
Feeding the scrum

The scrum-half is the player who gets things going in the scrum. It is their job to feed the ball into the scrum for the hooker to strike back to the number eight. The scrum-half can roll the ball in from either the left-hand side or the right-hand side of the scrum. The scrum-half must then not handle the ball until it has come out of the scrum. The six other backs must be at least five meters behind the off-side line running through the hindmost foot of the last forward in the scrum. If they are not, the referee will penalize the offending team.
Hooking the ball

When it comes to scrums, the hooker is the player with all the responsibility and pressure. Their job is to strike the ball back to the number 8 once the scrum-half has fed the ball into the scrum. This is not as easy as it sounds. Why? Because the opposition's hooker is trying to steal the ball from you. Plus you've got eight huge forwards on the other side trying to push you off the ball. The hooker is the only player in the scrum who can raise their feet - otherwise they would never be able to strike the ball. However, no other player in the scrum is allowed to handle the ball until the ball is free - not even the hooker.
When is a scrum ended?

A scrum is finished when the ball has come out of the scrum. Once it has, then the opposition scrum-half can tackle their opposite number for the ball. But in some situations the number 8 may dribble with the ball, keeping it in the scrum. This means the opposing scrum-half cannot get their hands on the ball because it's still in the scrum. This often happens when the team in possession have an attacking scrum near their opponent's try line.

RETAIKING A SCRUM
The referee is in charge on the pitch and if he's not happy with a scrum, he can order it to be re-taken again when:

- The scrum has rotated 90 degrees
- The scrum has collapsed before the ball has been fed or before the ball has come out
- The ball does not come out quick enough
What is a line-out?

The line-out is another awesome sight in rugby union. It is a way of restarting play after the ball has been knocked or kicked out of play past the touch line. The line-out consists of three to eight players from each side, up to 16 in total, and is taken where the ball went out of play. The aim of each player is simply to get their hands on the ball for their team. So how does it work? The advantage is with the team throwing in. They get the ball because they were not the team who last touched the ball before it went out. They also get to decide how many players will make up the line-out.
FORMING A LINE-OUT

The eight forwards and the scrum-half are the players who make up the line-out. The most important players are the hooker, the two second rows and scrum-half. They are responsible for getting the ball out to the backs or for the rest of the forwards. That does not mean the other players have nothing to do. Far from it.

The line-out must be formed past the five-meter line and no more than 15m in from the touchline, and both teams must have a one meter gap between them.

If the referee decides one team has purposely closed the gap, a penalty will be awarded to the other team.
The hooker is usually the player with the job of throwing the ball into a line-out. Their aim is to find the "jumpers", usually the two second rowers. But this is not easy. The other team also want the ball, so they'll be doing all they can to upset the hooker's throw. The hooker gets a call from one of the jumpers or the scrum half, usually in a code no-one except your team understands, on who to aim the throw at. They must stand behind the touch line when they make their throw. And the throw must be deadly straight, otherwise the referee will have the line-out taken again, but this time the opposition get the throw in...
RETAken ThROWS

The line-out may look very simple, but it has plenty of laws every player must follow:

- The ball must be thrown straight
- All players not in the line-out must be 10m behind the last man in the line
- No player can use a one of the opposition to use as support when they are jumping
- No player is allowed to push, charge or hold another player in the line-out
- No player can be lifted before the ball is thrown
- No jumper can use the outside of their arm to catch or deflect the ball

Depending on how serious the offence is, the referee will either award a penalty or free-kick to the team who did not make the offence.
Players must be careful not to infringe the rules in a ruck. When it comes to rules and regulations, the ruck is one of the more complex parts of rugby union. When a tackled player goes to ground, they must release the ball immediately. As soon as that happens, the opposition will want to get their hands on the ball, and the team in possession will not want to give it away. According to the laws, "the ruck is a phase of play where one or more players from each team, who are on their feet, in physical contact, close around the ball on the ground". So to gain possession, both sides must try to drive over the ball to make it available for their team-mates.
HANDS IN THE RUCK
None of the tackler's team-mates can attempt to handle or pick up the ball once the ruck has formed. Team-mates of the tackled player can use their hands, but only if they are on their feet. Referees often blow up for penalties because a player off their feet or from the tackler's team has used a subtle hand to bring it back to their side. But because of the sheer number of bodies involved in rucks, referees can sometimes miss this particular infringement.

JOINING A RUCK
All players must join the ruck from behind the 'hindmost' foot of the last player. They must bind with one arm round a team-mate at the very back of the ruck. Players cannot take shortcuts and join from the sides. If the referee spots this, a penalty will be given to the non-offending team.
USING THE BOOT
The ball can often get stuck under a pile of bodies, making it difficult for either team to make it available. Dangerous rucking is an instant penalty. Players are allowed to free the ball by using their boot. This term is called 'rucking'. However, they must ensure they do not make contact with players' heads or tread on bodies intentionally. Referees are particularly strict on this law for safety reasons, so reckless rucking can mean time in the sin-bin or even a red card.

DIVING IN
All players joining a ruck must be on their feet. But sometimes players dive in off their feet in an attempt to slow the ball down, allowing defenses to re-group. Referees are particularly strict on this.
BALL NOT FREE
If the ball does not come out of a ruck after about five seconds, the referee will award a scrum to the team he considers to have the greater forward momentum in the ruck.

What is a maul?
A maul occurs when three or more players, including the ball carrier and at least one other player from either side, are in contact together. What makes the maul different to the ruck is that the ball is not on the ground but in hand. But like the ruck, the offside line is the "hindmost" foot of the last team-mate bound to the maul. Players can only join in from behind that team-mate. Anyone who comes in from the sides will be penalized by the referee. Players joining the maul must have their heads or shoulders no lower than their hips and must have at least one arm bound to a team-mate. The team not in possession of the ball cannot deliberately collapse the maul. This is for safety reasons. Penalties can also be given for attempting to drag players out of the maul. However this can be allowed if players are legitimately dragging out members of the opposition who have ended up on the wrong side.
OBSTRUCTION
One of the infringements referees have clamped down on in the past few years has been obstruction in the maul, or "truck and trailer" as it has been called. This is when a player acts as a screen, blocking tacklers from reaching the ball carrier. However players can circumvent this law if two or more team-mates bind around the ball together and move forwards. As long as the tackler has a fair opportunity to contest the ball, the referee will allow the maul to continue.

'USE IT OR LOSE IT'
If the maul stops moving forwards the referee will often shout "use it or lose it" to the team in possession. This means they must pass the ball within a five-second time period. If they do not the referee will call a scrum and the team not in possession will be given the feed. However if a player has caught the ball from a kick-off or a drop-out and is drawn in the middle of a maul inside their own 22m line, the referee will award the scrum to their side if the ball has not come out in time. A maul ends when the ball is passed out or is on the ground.
The lowdown on the offside law
Offside is a complicated part of rugby union. Different phases of the game have their own set of offside laws.

OFFSIDE IN OPEN PLAY
If a player is in front of a team-mate in possession of the ball, or in front of a team-mate who last played the ball, they will be offside if they:
- Actively try to play the ball
- Do not retreat within 10m of an opponent who is waiting for the ball
- Move towards the opponents or the place where the ball lands without first coming back onside
The referee will award a penalty at the place where the offence took place.
**Offside at a Scrum**

For scrum-halves, the offside line is the line of the ball fed into the scrum. That means they can't go beyond that line until the ball has been put into the scrum by the opposing number nine. For all the other players, the offside line is an imaginary line drawn through the 'hindmost' foot of the last player in the scrum. No player apart from the eight forwards and scrum-halves are allowed within this area. The opposing scrum-half has to wait until the ball is out of the scrum before making a tackle for the ball. If they don't, the referee will award a penalty.
OFFSIDE AT A RUCK OR MAUL

Most offside decisions in rugby union happen at rucks and mauls, especially when the ball is being recycled a lot. Like the scrum, an imaginary line is drawn through the hindmost foot of the last player in the ruck or maul. Players must either join the ruck or maul or retreat behind the offside line.

A player is offside if they:

- Join from their opponent's side
- Join play from in front of the last man
- Do not join either the ruck or maul, but fail to get behind the offside line
- Leave the ruck or maul, but do not get behind the offside line.
OFFSIDE AT A LINE-OUT

There are two different imaginary offside lines for players involved in the line-out and those who are not. Effectively they make a box which is 10m wide either side of the line-out. Only the forwards and the scrum-half are allowed in this area until the ball has been thrown in, touched a player or the ground. The referee will create a one-meter gap between the two lines of forwards. This is the offside line between the two sets of forwards. Players must not encroach within this gap until the ball has touched a player or the ground, unless they are jumping for the ball. No player can leave the line-out until it has finished.
OFFSIDE AT A KICK

If a player is about to kick a high up-and-under or a grubber kick for a team-mate to run onto, the chasing player must be level or just behind the kicker. If they are not, the referee will award the opposition a penalty. If the player is in front of the kicker already, they cannot get involved with open play. Players often raise their arms when running back to an onside position. This shows the referee that they have no intention of joining play because they are in an offside position.
The laws of tackling

Tackling is the only way of legally bringing down your opponent in rugby union. But there are certain laws on how to tackle and if these are not adhered to, penalties will follow. When you tackle an opponent, you cannot make contact above the shoulders. This is for safety reasons. The referee will instantly give a penalty if he sees a high tackle, and a few stronger words may follow if the challenge is deemed dangerous. Expect a yellow card and a spell in the sin-bin or a red card and instant dismissal for more serious offences. Other laws govern what can and cannot happen once a tackle has been made.
GOING TO GROUND
Once a player in possession of the ball has been brought to ground by a tackler, they must release the ball immediately. They can do this either by passing off to a team-mate or placing the ball on the ground. The tackler must release the player they have just brought down and roll away from them and the ball. If the referee believes the tackler has not rolled away quick enough, he will award a penalty to the opposition. The same is true for the player who has been tackled. If they do not release the ball immediately and roll away from it, they will concede a penalty. Referees are strict on this, because players can often try to slow the ball up for the opposition, helping their side to re-group in defense.

STEALING BALL IN THE TACKLE
If they are quick enough, a team-mate of the tackler can pick up the ball from the contact area as long as they are on their feet. However as soon as a team-mate from the ball carrier's side comes into contact with that player and the ball is still on the ground, the tackle then becomes a ruck. None of the tackler's team-mates can attempt to handle or pick up the ball once the ruck has formed. However they can use their strength to drive over the team in possession and attempt to win the ball.
OTHER LAWS

If a player has been tackled and their natural momentum takes them over the try-line and the ball is grounded, a try is awarded.

A player tackled near the goal-line can also reach out and attempt to touch the ball down for a try.

There are certain situations where tackles cannot be made. If the ball carrier has been held by an opponent, but has not gone to ground, and a team-mate has bound onto them, a maul is formed. At that point a tackle cannot be made for safety reasons.
Knock-ons and forward passes

Rugby union is one of the few ball games where the ball cannot be passed forwards. That means a player moving towards the opposition's dead ball line must pass the ball to a team-mate either along or behind an imaginary line running at right angles to the side of the pitch. The same principle applies even when players are not passing the ball. If they fail to catch or pick up the ball cleanly and it travels forward off a hand or arm and hits the ground or another player, it is called a knock-on. The same applies if a player is tackled and the ball goes forward. If a player fumbles the ball but catches it before it has hit the ground or another player, it is not a knock-on. When a knock-on occurs, the referee will stop play and award a scrum to the team which has not knocked on. If the ball is thrown forward at a line-out, a scrum is awarded 15 meters in from the touchline. If the referee decides a player has intentionally knocked on or thrown the ball forward, a penalty is awarded to the other team. And if the referee decides the other team would have scored a try if the intentional knock-on had not taken place, a penalty try is awarded.

The one exception to the knock-on rule is the charge-down. If a player charges down the ball as an opponent kicks it, it is not a knock-on, even if the ball travels forward.
The obstruction law explained

In rugby union, you can only tackle a player in possession of the ball. Sometimes, a player will deliberately get in the way of an opponent because they think their rival has a good chance of getting to the ball first, but it is not allowed. You cannot charge or push an opponent when running for the ball, except if the contact is shoulder-to-shoulder. Blocking an opponent in order to stop them tackling one of your team-mates, or moving in front of a team-mate in order to act as a shield, is also outlawed. Standing in a position which stops an opponent from playing the ball is also considered to be obstruction. Players running with the ball after it has left a set-piece cannot make contact with a team-mate in front of them.

And flankers cannot block the opposition's scrum-half as they try to advance around the scrum.

For all these offences, a penalty is awarded to the opposition. The offender could also find themselves shown a yellow card, which results in a 10-minute spell in the sin-bin.
The 22-metre drop-out

This is one of the methods used to restart play when the ball has gone over a team's dead ball line. For example, if the attacking team kicks the ball beyond the dead ball line, a member of the defending team can touch it down for a 22-metre drop-out. The defending team can also ground the ball in their in-goal area for a drop-out if a player on the other side was the last person to touch the ball. Once the ball has been touched down, a player from the defending team can advance to the 22m line and restart play with a drop kick. They can kick the ball a short distance forward and try to regain possession, put up a high kick for the forwards to get under or kick the ball as far as possible down the field. A 22-metre drop-out is not awarded, however, if a member of the defending team has either passed or carried the ball back over the dead ball line before the ball is touched down. In this case, a five-meter scrum is awarded to the attacking team.
The five-meter scrum

This scrum is one of the best ways of cranking up the pressure on your opponent's defense. It is given to the attacking side after one of the defending team has grounded the ball inside their own goal area. But it is only given if a member of the defending team has carried or passed the ball back into their own in-goal area before the ball is touched down. If this is not the case, the defending team is awarded a 22-metre drop-out.

The other way a five-meter scrum can be awarded is if the attacking team gets within five meters of the try line, but is held up by the opposition's defense. Because the attacking team has the momentum going forward, the referee will award it the feed at the scrum.
Calling a 'mark'

Taking a mark happens when a player catches the ball in a defensive position. It was introduced to give protection to full-backs and other players trying to catch high up-and-under kicks in pressure situations. Calling a mark is a great way of relieving the pressure in defense when the opposition are on the attack inside the 22-metre line. A player can only make the mark when they catch a high ball inside their own 22-metre or in-goal area.

As they catch the ball they shout "MARK".

If they catch the ball cleanly, the referee will give that player a free-kick on the spot where they caught the ball. Only the player who has called for the mark can take the kick. They then have the chance to clear their lines.

One thing to note is that a mark cannot be called when a player catches the ball direct from the kick-off.
When the sin-bin calls

This is a place you should avoid at all costs.

The sin-bin is the bench where all players who have committed a yellow card offence sit out of the game for 10 minutes.

If the referee believes a player has committed a serious foul or shown indiscipline, then he will show them the yellow card, just like in football.

But unlike in football, that player must then immediately leave the pitch. They then have to sit in the sin-bin for 10 minutes while the game continues without them.

It leaves their team a man down for a sizeable chunk of the game, giving the opposition the perfect opportunity to push for points.
As with any sport, rugby union requires a few pieces of specialist equipment. Union is a physical, full-contact sport - so expect a few knocks while playing. But with the proper equipment, you can reduce the chances of injuries, as well as enjoy playing the game more.
Players have always used some form of head protection over the years, from full-backs to loose head props. But since the game turned professional in 1995, there are now strict laws about using protective equipment on the pitch. And since October 2000, the International Rugby Board (IRB), the game's governing body, must approve any form of head protection.

Headgear is usually made from light plastic materials capable of taking serious impact. They're often used by front row forwards to prevent blows to the head and damage to their ears while in scrums or mauls.

The most important thing to remember if you want to wear head protection is to make sure it is comfortable - otherwise it will cause unwanted pain and injury.

If you are a front row forward, make sure the cap does not cause you any problems in the scrum.

If you can, scrum down with a friend when you are trying on different models, to make sure it fits properly.
Rugby union equipment: gum shield

The gum shield is the most important piece of equipment a rugby player should own. The gum shield not only protects your teeth and gums, it can reduce damage around the jaw and your chances of getting concussed. As every mouth is different, so every gum shield should be molded to fit perfectly around the top half of a player’s mouth. The best way of doing this is to go and see your dentist, who will make sure the shield is right for your mouth. The other type of gum shield is the "boil in the bag" type which is molded using hot water. Put the warm shield in your mouth and suck on it for roughly three minutes until it has molded to the shape of your upper teeth.
Rugby union equipment: shirt

Rugby shirts need to be able to take plenty of tugging and pulling. They also need to be lightweight, comfortable and strong - all at the same time. Traditionally, jerseys were made from cotton, which would often get very heavy if it was raining. But technology has seen new lightweight water-resistant, synthetic fibers in modern jerseys. Although your rugby team/school will provide your jerseys for matches, it is worth buying one for training. Make sure you get the right fit - too small and it will rip, too big and your opponents will be able to tackle you more easily. Many shirts at the top level are designed to be figure-hugging. They are lighter and are designed to snap back once someone tries to grab them. There are also different designs for the forwards in the scrum and the backs or loose forwards. The five forwards in the scrum wear shirts that have panels for their team-mates to grab onto.
Upper body protection has been a regular feature of the sport for the past 20 years.
The areas vulnerable to injury are the shoulders and the chest, which often take much of the impact in tackles, so it's important these areas are well protected.
Modern upper body protection is made from very strong and lightweight material.
Again comfort is the most important factor when considering chest protection.
Make sure it fits you well, otherwise it will be extremely uncomfortable on the field, as well as increasing your chance of picking up an injury.
But remember, wearing body protection doesn't mean you are invincible and can do things others rugby players can't - you'll do yourself more damage if you think like that.
Rugby Union equipment: ball

A good quality rugby ball will help you improve your handling and kicking skills on and off the field. In the old days, rugby balls were made of hand-stitched leather. But it would often get very heavy when it rained, making it very difficult to handle in slippery conditions. Technology has seen new waterproof materials which make the ball easier to handle in wet and muddy conditions. Make sure your ball is properly pumped full of air before you start practicing your passing, catching and kicking on your own or with a team-mate.

Rugby union equipment: shorts

Rugby shorts are traditionally made from cotton, designed to take the strains of rugby union. Second row forwards now use special line-out shorts which have reinforced stitching to help them to get lifted in the line out. Again, shorts should be comfortable - tight shorts are not only embarrassing, but also increase the chances of sustaining a serious injury. As with shirts, the longer and baggier shorts are, the easier it will be for opponents to pull you back.
Rugby Union equipment: boots

Traditional rugby boots are very similar to football boots, but the thing that makes them different is a high cut designed to give extra support to the ankle. However, more and more players prefer to use football style boots, especially backs, who favor the low cut for extra mobility. So it is important to understand what position you are playing before choosing what kind of rugby boot you want.

CHOOSING A PAIR OF BOOTS
It is important to understand the shape of your feet and your running style. Find out whether you are flat-footed or have a high arch. Ideally rugby boots will fit snugly, although if your feet are still growing it's advisable to allow a little bit of room. Also, different players prefer different fits.

As forwards rely on lower body strength for power in scrums, they need extra support around the ankle to help prevent foot injuries. Kickers prefer a tight-fitting boot because it gives them a better feel for the ball, while props like a high ankle cut for extra support in scrums. It's worth wearing the same types of socks you would wear on the pitch when you try on a boot for size.
Leather and synthetic boots are both available and there are advantages with each. Leather moulds itself to the shape of your feet but can stretch out of shape in wet conditions. Synthetic boots are often lighter and less expensive. Try and find soft uppers, this will prevent potential injuries - you may even find that a boot that's a mix of leather and synthetics is best for you.

**SCREW-IN STUDS**
This type of boot tends to be popular because players can adjust their studs depending on the conditions. If the pitch is muddy then it is worth using a longer set of studs, changing to shorter studs on a drier day. When changing or tightening studs it is a good idea to put a bit of grease to the thread to prevent them from rusting.

**STUDS**
As rugby is a full contact sport, wearing the wrong kind of studs can do you - or a member of the opposition - a lot of harm.

Referees will check whether your boots have any sharp edges or ridges, but it is also your duty to make sure your boots and studs are in good order.
Referee Signals

Referee signals are an important communication tool. Only those few players close to you will hear clearly the decisions made by most referee's. The use of signals allows players, coaches and spectators to understand the rulings made by the referee.

For a complete list of Referee Signals and what they stand for, click here

If there is one thing that sets rugby apart from all the other sports you've seen or played, it is that after a match, you lay differences aside and have a party. There is a spirit of camaraderie among rugby players. After all, it is a weird sport -- nobody gets paid, you travel all around, and get bruises for your trouble. You've GOT to have a passion for it and despite all rivalries, it is a passion shared by everyone who plays it. As the sport is unique and intense, so are its players. Meeting people of all varieties, from all parts of the country, is one of rugby's greatest delights.

Rugby is a lot of things to a lot of people. It is challenging and playful, exuberant and exciting. There are always new things to learn and old limits to push aside. We hope you will love it as much as we do.