

LEARNING MADE EASY



4th Edition

Rugby

for
dummies[®]
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Demystify
the game of rugby

—
Understand rugby
laws and rules

—
Dive into the
rugby sevens format

Mathew Brown

Rugby TV Producer, Writer, Player,
Coach & Fan

Patrick Guthrie

Rugby TV Director, Player,
Coach & Referee



Rugby

4th Edition

By Mathew Brown and Patrick Guthrie

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dummies[®]
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Rugby For Dummies,® 4th Edition

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Introduction

Welcome to *Rugby For Dummies*, 4th Edition. This book is your introduction to a sport that has attracted a passionate following around the world for more than a century, but has only recently exploded in popularity in the United States and Canada. As rugby devotees ourselves, we understand the natural appeal of the sport and why you feel the need to find out more about it.

Rugby is the world's third-most popular team sport and is played in 129 countries. The nonstop action is breathtaking as the athletes confront each other over 80 minutes of gut-wrenching competition.

Although it was first introduced here almost 150 years ago, up until very recently rugby was a mystery to most North Americans. In the last few decades, rugby has made the transition from being a totally amateur game to a fully professional sport. This revolutionary development has increased the fitness of the players, sped up the game, and created a vastly more entertaining, television-friendly product that is growing by leaps and bounds all across North America.

This book is intended to help rugby fans, parents, players, coaches, and their families get acquainted with the basic elements of this fantastic game. We hope this book lifts the veil of mystery that has shrouded the sport and enables you to appreciate both the excitement on the field and the camaraderie off it that makes rugby truly unique.

About This Book

Rugby For Dummies includes all the information you need to get started in the sport, whether you want to be a player, coach, or spectator. It's the first comprehensive guide to all things rugby and was written specifically for a North American audience. Plenty of foreign books talk about rugby, but to our knowledge, this is the only one that explains the game in terms that Americans and Canadians can easily understand.

We've made ease of access and cross-referencing a priority at all times, so you can use this book to quickly locate a specific topic, find the information you're looking for, and get on with your life.

Foolish Assumptions

In this book, we've made some assumptions about your experience with rugby:

- » You've probably heard it described as "football without pads" and think it's a tough sport that's mostly played by foreigners.
- » You've seen it on TV or streaming online and thought that it looked pretty cool but were unable to follow the action or understand what was happening from minute to minute, especially when the referee blew the whistle.
- » You know somebody who played the game in college and they loved it but they mostly talk about the parties afterward.
- » Your child, grandchild, or someone you know has just started playing rugby and you want to be able to intelligently watch them play their new sport.

Icons Used in This Book

To help you navigate your way through this book, six icons appear in the margins. The icons point you to a particular type of information, depending on your needs. The icons mean the following:



TIP

We use this icon to offer useful information and advice for both the player and the coach. And even if you're not either of those, the information highlighted with this icon will help you elevate your knowledge and enjoyment of the game.



REMEMBER

When you see this icon, you know that the information that follows is important enough to read twice!



WARNING

Whenever safety is an issue, we use this symbol to alert you of the potential risk and then explain how to minimize or avoid harm.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This icon indicates a technical discussion is underway. You can skip this information if you want to because it isn't necessary for an understanding of the basics. If you do read it, though, your rugby expertise will go up a few notches.



BROWNIE
SAYS

When you see this icon, get buckled in for an entertaining tale from your coauthor's vast reservoir of rugby exploits, recounted from his unique rugby-centric perspective of the universe.



GUTHRIE
SAYS

When you find this icon, remember that your other coauthor has been at the forefront of bringing rugby to the North American audience for almost three decades and has, by necessity, become a self-educated expert in everything related to the game.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the abundance of information and guidance related to rugby that we provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at Dummies.com. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for "Rugby For Dummies Cheat Sheet."

Where to Go from Here

So now you're ready to start your incredible journey into the world's most amazing game. Where you go from here depends on your experience and the type of information you're looking for. If you've got no clue at all, start at the beginning and enjoy the ride. If you have a question about a particular phase of play, head directly to that chapter and get the answers you need.

Regardless of where you begin, we're confident that by the time you reach the end of your trip through these pages, you'll see the light and share our love for the game they play in heaven. Welcome to the rugby family!

1

Rugby: Roots, Boots, and All

IN THIS PART . . .

To make you feel comfortable about everything rugby, this part provides an introduction to the game and lays out the basic parameters of the sport.

To start, we tell you why rugby is so awesome and one of the most widely played sports around the world. We explain what's required to win, describe how the scoring system works, show the field on which the game is played, and spell out what goes on during a match. Finally, we tell you what gear you'll need to have when you show up for that first training session.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Exploring rugby's illustrious past
- » Understanding how the game is played
- » Going around the world with rugby
- » Calling the shots with coaches and referees
- » Staying in touch with the rugby world

Chapter **1**

Rugby's Beginnings, Allure, and a Basic Overview

Why do millions of fans around the globe watch 30 players chase an oval ball on a field of grass as if the world would end if they missed one pass, kick, or tackle? Because they're hooked on rugby — a game of passion that's full of action, excitement, and beauty, as well as unpredictable moments and dramatic resolutions on the field, plus unique camaraderie off of it. When played by the best competitors in the sport, rugby satisfies the soul like nothing else.

Rugby's Roots: The Birth of the Game

The game gets its name from Rugby, a town in England's Midlands, where it was first played at Rugby School. The legend goes that in 1823 a schoolboy by the name of William Webb Ellis first picked up the ball in the middle of a soccer game and ran with it, thereby breaking the old rules and setting the stage for an entirely new game (see the following section for the creation of this myth).

What is true is that the game was popularized and the rules codified at Rugby School. The school's alumni spread the game throughout Britain to other schools and universities, like Oxford and Cambridge, and eventually to the far reaches of the British Empire.

The mythical pick-up of William Webb Ellis

William Webb Ellis was indeed a student at Rugby School from 1816 to 1825, and then he went on to study at Oxford before joining the clergy. He died in 1872 and is buried in Menton, in the South of France. But his being a student at Rugby School in 1823 is about as much historical fact as can be determined about him regarding his invention of the game of rugby. In reality, four years after his death the myth was created for a specific purpose — so that the upper classes in England could justify their control of the game. Around the time the story was concocted, rugby was in the throes of a great battle between amateurism and professionalism that would eventually split the sport into two different codes.

Ellis's posthumous anointment as father of the game was a significant event in that battle, and his name lives on today as the embodiment of the sport's crowning achievement, the William Webb Ellis Cup, which is awarded to the winner of the quadrennial World Cup (see Chapter 12 for more about the World Cup).

A century of amateurism

From its beginnings at English public schools, rugby was definitely an elitist pursuit that actively discouraged and prohibited the payment of players. In 1895, after the Rugby Football Union (RFU) refused to allow clubs to compensate players for missing work to play the game, 22 clubs broke away from the union to form the Northern Football Union. This forerunner of professional rugby league (a similar game but with only 13 players) eventually adopted its own set of rules and began paying players — something rugby union wouldn't do for another century.

Up until the 1990s, rugby union was a strictly amateur sport. While there were obviously numerous cases of cushy jobs, special treatment, and under-the-table payments, rugby administrators in both hemispheres diligently ferreted out cases of direct pay-for-play offers and banned those who were caught. Making the jump to rugby league meant no further involvement in rugby union at any level.

The fact that this prohibition against remuneration outlasted even the Olympic movement's similar rule is a testament to the amount of control the game's conservative governors exerted over a worldwide sport. By 1995, the pressures of money and television had become too great and, under threat of losing the best players to league or upstart union competitions, the powers that be capitulated and the sport entered a new era of professionalism.

REASONS WHY RUGBY IS SO AWESOME

We've been collectively around the game from club to international level for almost 70 years, and have observed the following truths about the game. Here are the reasons we think rugby is the best sport in the world:

- **Anyone can play rugby.** The game does not discriminate — rich or poor, male or female, young or old, every person can enjoy this fantastic game.
- **There's a position for everyone.** Whether you are 7 feet tall or 5 feet tall, 100 pounds or 300 pounds, fleet as a cheetah or slow as an ox, an appropriate position exists for every body type.
- **Everyone participates fully.** Although there are 15 different positions, each player uses a skill set that includes running with the ball, passing, tackling, rucking, mauling, and kicking.
- **Rugby tests athleticism and courage.** Fast running, towering kicking, and fearless tackling are all elements of the game that challenge players to reach their athletic potential in the face of danger.
- **Rugby players share a global bond.** The game is played in more than 100 countries, but its devotees nevertheless belong to a select group. No rugby player is ever without a friend as long as another rugby player is nearby.
- **Rugby has a unique ethos on the field.** Rugby is a hard, aggressive game that attracts fierce competitors. Regardless of the intensity, however, honorable conduct is expected of all participants, and you won't find the sort of trash-talking that pollutes most other professional sports in North America.
- **Rugby has a unique ethos off the field.** The same players who do their best to legally smash each other for 80 minutes during a match will always shake hands and share a beverage and a chat afterward. Whether at a club game or the highest international level, socializing with the opposition is mandatory.
- **Rugby is easy to follow.** Although it looks chaotic at first, rugby is easy to understand and appreciate when you become familiar with a few simple principles of play.
- **Rugby people are cool.** Rugby brings together a gregarious, intelligent, diverse group of characters who are fun to be around.
- **Rugby has a proud history.** While it is new to many North Americans, rugby has a long and storied tradition of competitive excellence, fair play, and sporting spirit that transcends the game itself.



REMEMBER

Rugby Union, or simply “rugby,” has a passionate, worldwide following and is played in more than half the countries on the planet. Rugby League, or just “league,” is a more regionally popular game with adherents mostly located in Northern England, Southern France, and in scattered parts of Australasia. The sole subject of this book is Rugby Union.

How the Game Is Played

At first glance, rugby can look very complicated. The rugby field is covered in a myriad of lines and populated by 30 players running around and performing seemingly disjointed actions while wearing a variety of accoutrements. Don’t fear, though — a little bit of explanation will clear up exactly where they are, what they’re doing, and what they’re wearing.

The field



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Rugby is played on a grass field measuring 100 meters long by no more than 70 meters wide (109.4 yards long by 76.5 yards wide). At each end of the field there are goalposts on the goal line and an in-goal area that varies by venue but is usually between 10 and 22 meters long (10.9 yards to 24.1 yards). (All measurements in this book and in rugby are given in meters.)

Lots of lines are marked on a rugby field. The most important ones are the following:

- » **Goal lines:** Players have to reach these lines in order to score.
- » **22-meter lines:** These lines are vital because they influence where play restarts after the ball is kicked out from behind them.
- » **Halfway line:** This is where play starts after every score.

We talk more about the field — and all its other lines — in Chapter 2.

The scoring

The aim of rugby is to score more points than the opposition. This is done in four different ways:

- » **Try:** The most valuable play is to score a *try*, which means touching the ball down in the opponent’s in-goal area or on their goal line. Doing so is worth five points and earns that team the right to attempt a conversion kick.

- » **Conversion kick:** This kick is worth an additional two points. The conversion kick is taken from a spot in line with where the ball was originally grounded, so scoring as close to the posts as possible is best.
- » **Penalty kick:** Penalties for various infractions can be used to take a kick at goal, which is worth three points.
- » **Dropped goal:** A *dropped goal*, which occurs when the player drops the ball on the ground and then kicks it just as it bounces, is worth three points if it goes through the uprights.

We cover scoring in greater detail in Chapter 2.

The gear

In the old days, rugby players wore boots, socks, jerseys, and maybe a bit of tape. The laws have changed over the years to allow much more safety gear to be worn. In the modern era, seeing players wearing padded headgear, compression shorts, light padding under their jerseys to protect shoulders and ribs, and, of course, mouth guards is common. Chapter 3 lets you know what's legal to wear and what's not.

Understanding the Essentials of the Game

Like most sports that didn't originate in North America, rugby can be difficult to comprehend at first glance because of the large number of players involved, the seemingly random calls of the referee, and the wide variety of strategies employed by different teams to score points and get wins. To help you begin your journey toward a complete understanding of the game, in the following sections we outline who all the players are, explain what the referee is generally looking for during the match, and spell out the basic skills required to be successful on the pitch.

Puzzling out the positions

A rugby team has 15 positions. Each player wears a specific number and each number corresponds to individual responsibilities:

- » 1 and 3 are the props
- » 2 is the hooker
- » 4 and 5 are the locks



TIP

- » 6 and 7 are the flankers
- » 8 is, conveniently enough, the eightman

This group is collectively referred to as the pack or the forwards.

A rugby team has another group as well — the backs or back line:

- » 9 is the scrumhalf
- » 10 is the flyhalf
- » 11 and 14 are the wings
- » 12 and 13 are the inside and outside centers
- » 15 is the fullback

To get a feel for what each player is charged with doing on the rugby pitch, see Chapter 4.

Grasping the laws of the game

Rugby is governed by laws, not rules. The laws of the game are designed to produce an entertaining and free-flowing contest for possession in an attempt to score the most points. Twenty-one laws cover all aspects of the field, the players, and the match officials. The referee, helped by two assistant referees, is the sole judge of fact and law during a match.

The laws are constantly evolving and are the same all over the world, wherever the game is played. Chapter 5 details where the laws come from and also shows pictures of all the different referee signals to help you figure out what's going on the very first time you watch a match.

In general the laws governing play are straightforward about what's allowed, but three crucial parts can be somewhat confusing: the tackle situation, advantage, and offsides:

- » In a nutshell, when a tackle is made in rugby, the requirements are that the tackler releases the tackled player, who then releases the ball so that players who are on their feet can use it.
- » Advantage simply means that when one team makes an error the other team can try to capitalize on it, instead of the referee immediately stopping the action. If the non-offending team can't capitalize on the error, play restarts where the original mistake took place.