



SPORTS  
SCIENCE  
INSTITUTE OF  
SOUTH AFRICA



# Junior rugby

coaching manual



Primary

school



# Junior rugby

coaching manual contents



## Introduction

The purpose of the Junior rugby coaching manual  
Teach children the exciting game of rugby

3

## Understanding the game

The aim of rugby  
Safety

4

## Planning your practice

Recommended practice frequency and duration  
How to structure a practice session

5

## Warm-up activities

Suitable warm-up for rugby

6

## Skills development and training

A detailed description of the skills required for the game

9

## The Warm-down

Tips on how to warm-down

39

## Putting it together

Tips on how to warm-down

39

## Evaluation

A checklist you can use to evaluate your players' skills  
and abilities

40

## Appendix: Rules, positions and equipment

A list and explanation of all the rules  
A description of the rugby field and the positions  
to teach children  
A list of the recommended equipment for the coach  
and rugby players

41

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## Introduction

Junior rugby  
coaching manual



“We wish to change our nation’s children by instilling in them the desire to be more active, not just now but for all their lives. We aim to achieve this by teaching each child a competence in and passion for at least one sport. This we will do by building a sports coaching culture for our children ...”

Many factors in modern society have resulted in children and adults becoming increasingly inactive. This has had an alarming effect on their health. Regular physical activity plays an important role in the prevention and treatment of many lifestyle-related diseases such as coronary artery disease, strokes and type 2 diabetes (non-insulin dependent diabetes). Sports are a great way to encourage children to get more physically active and healthy. That’s why Discovery Vitality has developed a series of sports manuals for primary schools in South Africa.

### The purpose of the Junior rugby coaching manual

This manual provides teachers and coaches with relevant information on how to coach rugby so that children get the maximum benefits from doing the sport – to get physically active, healthy and fit. The focus of the manual is on developing the **basic skills needed** for juniors (up to the age of 12) to be competent on the field. The main focus is on **providing exercises and drills** to help you plan your practise and develop skills, rather than to give a comprehensive framework of the rules of rugby.

Professor Tim Noakes of the Sports Science Institute of South Africa has a dream to make South African children the fittest in the world by 2020. He believes that through initiatives like the Vitality Schools Programme we can reach this goal. You too can play a part in making this vision a reality!

### Teach children the exciting game of rugby

Rugby is a team contact sport that appeals to children of all shapes and sizes. It involves running, dodging, pushing, passing and contact with other players. All these movements build fitness of the heart and lungs, and stimulate balanced muscular development for growing bodies.





## Understanding the game

### The aim of rugby

The aim of the game is to score more points than the opposition. There are generally two phases of play: attack and defence. During attack, the team in possession of the ball moves upfield and tries to score a try by placing the ball over the opponents' try line. Defence happens when the defending team falls back and tries to tackle the attacking team to get the ball back and prevent the other team from scoring a try. Players use skills such as catching, passing, kicking, running with the ball and avoiding the opposition.

### Safety

As with any sport, there is a risk of injury when playing rugby. Coaching the correct techniques will lower this risk. The majority of rugby-related injuries happen in the contact situation and can be avoided through the use of proper technique. The contact phases of the game include the scrum, the tackle situation, the lineout, and the ruck and maul.

In the tackle situation, players who are not used to being tackled tend to fall, tense up and develop 'tunnel vision.' The best way to avoid this is to help young players develop confidence in the tackle situation.

The tackle can happen from any direction (in front, behind or from the side of the player), which makes it difficult to prepare learners for all possible tackles. In general, the best method is to accelerate into and brace for the tackle (put the hard part of the body into the tackle), roll into the correct direction and protect the ball so that it is available for team mates. More on this can be found in the unit skills section, along with descriptions of other ways to prevent injury in the contact phases of the game.

Contact is often unnecessary and should be avoided when possible. Whenever players are given the opportunity to play, it is the coach's role to observe players and ensure that they are using safe techniques in contact. The coach should also ensure that all players are wearing gum guards during practice and matches.

### Key points on how to lower the risk of injury when entering a contact situation:

- Keep the head up (face up and chin off the chest)
- Keep a straight back
- Keep eyes open and focused on the target area.



## Planning your practice

### Practice frequency and duration

When trying to encourage children to participate in sport it is essential that sessions are fun. Training is not necessarily about quantity but rather quality, so we suggest that you have two one hour sessions a week.

### Putting the practice together

As the coach, use your creativity and imagination to get the most out of your practice time. It is recommended that you stick to a framework that will help you cover all the important aspects of rugby training. The table on the next page summarises the framework on how to set up a good practice session.

Phase	Description and principles	Length
Warm-up and games*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective is to prepare players physically and ease them into activity</li> <li>Should be lively, fun, engaging and instructional</li> <li>Players should be prepared and sufficiently warm so as to engage in higher intensity exercise and physical contact</li> </ul>	15 minutes, consisting of 2 - 3 of the available activities
Skills development and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific attention is paid to individual players and skills training</li> <li>Skills include specific handling skills: placing a ball, picking up a ball, receiving a pass, catching a ball and passing</li> <li>Skills also include defensive and attacking skills, such as evasive running and tackling</li> </ul>	15 minutes, consisting of two of the available drills for specific handling skills (see individual skills section)
		10 minutes, consisting of two drills for defensive and attacking skills
Match or game time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the practise is held before a scheduled match, focus on unit work such as mauling and rucking. Also work on scrumming and lineouts for the forwards, and passing down the line for the backline</li> <li>If there is no scheduled match play, a small game can be organised by dividing the players into two evenly matched teams</li> </ul>	15 minutes
Warm-down* phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunity to get all players together at the end and reinforce key lessons of the practise</li> <li>Also helps to ease players out of activity</li> </ul>	5 minutes
		Total 60 minutes
All phases have drills and training games you can use to make sessions fun and enjoyable for your players while also helping you teach the skills properly. We've explained the drills in the sections that follow.		
* Refer to the General coaching manual for a list of static and dynamic stretches.		



## Warm-up activities

These warm-up activities should be fun and ease players into activity. Skills should not be coached during this phase of the practise, and there should be very little talking except to encourage players to perform the drills safely and correctly. Feel free to adapt the drills and create new ones to suit your players.

### Backwards passing

#### Set up

- Divide players into groups of 10.

#### How to do the activity

- Players jog in a line, each one positioned slightly behind the player who will pass the ball to him
- The ball is passed back along the line
- Once the player has passed the ball he must hang back to ensure that he is not in front of the player with the ball

#### Progression

- Add more balls
- Change the type of pass that is being used.

### Chasing the ball

#### Set up

- Mark out a 20 m x 20 m grid.

#### How to do the activity

- Divide players into pairs
- Each pair has one ball
- The player with the ball has to run evasively in the grid trying to get away from the other player
- The other player needs to try and stay within 1 m of the ball carrier
- Allow the activity to continue for 20 seconds and then swap the ball carriers and repeat the activity.

#### Progression

- On the coach's call, the ball carrier passes the ball to the other player who has to evade the original player
- On the coach's command, the ball is placed on the ground and picked up by the other player. Roles are then reversed.



## Field runs

### Set up

- Divide players into two groups.

### How to do the activity

- The groups line up on diagonal corners of the field
- The first group jogs the length and sprints the width of the field
- Once the group reaches the opposite corner, the second group starts with their jog
- Continue the activity for 10 minutes.

### Progression

- The coach names the player who leads the sprint.

## Horse and jockey

### Set up

- Mark out a 20 m diameter circle with 10 cones.

### How to do the activity

- In pairs of two, place all players around the circle. In the pair, one player will be a horse and the other a jockey. The horses (players closest to the centre of the circle) stay stationary while the jockeys (facing the centre of the circle) shuffle sideways either clockwise or anticlockwise. While the jockeys are shuffling, the horses pass a rugby ball around the circle.
- At the command of 'climb', all jockeys climb (piggy-back) their horses. Make sure all horses are in a strong body position (legs slightly bent, back straight and feet shoulder-width apart). Assist weaker players who are not able to piggy-back their team mates.
- A couple of seconds later, command 'dismount.' The jockeys get off the horses and continue shuffling around the circle. Encourage horses to keep passing the ball around the circle when they get 'climbed'.

### Progression

- Add more balls
- Have horses shuffle around the circle with jockeys on their backs.



## Rob the nest

### Set up

- Place four cones in a square (20 m X 20 m). Place four to six balls in the middle of it, and three to five players on each corner.

### How to do the activity

- On the command of 'go' one player from each corner should run to the middle, collect a ball and place it in their nest (their cone). Make sure the balls are placed down and not thrown or dropped
- When they return, they tag the next player in who goes on to collect another ball
- Once all balls are collected from the middle of the grid, players can steal balls from other groups. Players can't protect the ball in their nest
- The first team with three balls back in their own nest wins.

### Progression

- The coach can hold balls back to lengthen the game, and add balls to shorten the game
- The coach can also allow the balls to be passed back to the nest, and the next player can only leave once the ball is in the nest.

## Rugby ball touch

### Set up

- Make a square out of four cones (20 m X 20 m). Divide the square into grids (5 m X 5 m) with 10 players in each grid (adjust according to numbers). Use one rugby ball.

### How to do the activity

- Two of the players will be 'on' and eight players 'off'. The objective is for the 'on' players to touch the 'off' players with the rugby ball. Once touched with the ball, 'off' players become 'on' players. The touch can happen by throwing or passing the ball into an 'off' player, or by touching an off player with the ball in hand.

### Progression

- Instruct 'on' players not to run with the ball
- Encourage all the other players to keep running and stay in the game.





## Skills development and training

Skills development and training should be the focus of your practise sessions so the basic skills of rugby can be taught. The aim with young players is to spend about 70% of the time focusing on skills development and only 30% on competition. This way, drills are fun and stimulating and not too competitive. It is important that players don't have to wait in lines where they get bored – you should have a 'no queue' policy during your practises! Make it a priority to teach the skills on both the left and right sides so players become equally capable on each side. Remember to get creative.

### Attributes of a good player

A good rugby player has skills that include:

- Speed
- Endurance
- Explosive power for acceleration
- Strength
- Stability
- Agility.
- Coordination
- Fearlessness

### Individual skills

Individual skills include handling skills and defensive and attacking skills.

Handling skills include:

- Picking up the ball
- Catching and passing while running
- Receiving a pass
- Placing the ball
- Passing the ball
- Popping the ball.

Attacking skills include:

- Falling and popping
- Making contact
- Tackling
- Front-on tackling
- Draw and pass
- The sidestep.

Each skill is explained in more detail in the next section.



## Teaching correct technique



### Picking up the ball

In rugby, one should pick the ball up correctly, ensure that the ball is not knocked on and, at the same time, ensure safe body positioning to lower the risk of injury

- Ask for the ball by shouting: 'My ball'
- Move towards the ball side-on, keeping eyes on the ball
- Bend the knees and present the hard parts of the body to the opposition (eg. the hips)
- Place the front foot past the ball
- Create a balanced wide base with the feet
- Secure and pick up the ball with both hands (do not scoop the ball up), and bring the ball up towards the chest
- The same key points apply whether the ball is picked up from the front or from the side.

Figure 1



Notice in the picture that the player's body position is perfect, but he is not looking at the ball. This is a common mistake and needs constant correction.



2

## Placing the ball

This skill is important for placing the ball behind the try line and scoring tries, as well as promoting general skills development and coordination.

- Bend the knees and present the hard parts of the body to the opposition
- While staying sideways, place the ball with two hands behind the front foot
- Ensure that the ball is firmly placed and does not move after it has been placed
- Always ensure that the ball is placed with both hands.

Figure 2





### 3

## Popping the ball

When a player is held in a tackle, or when a supporting team mate is close enough to the player with the ball, a pop is often more effective and easier for the supporting team mate to catch than a conventional pass:

- Hold the ball in two hands
- Look at the receiver
- Move away from the contact and then pop the ball
- Flick the wrists and float the ball into the hands of the receiver
- Ensure that the pop is not a conventional flat pass. The ball should be lofted and the supporter should run into the lofted pass
- Emphasise that the player should pass backwards.

Figure 3a



Figure 3b



4

### Passing the ball (sideways)

To attack successfully in rugby, players should be able to pass to players running to the left and right of them. This skill is unique to rugby, and players new to the game will struggle at first.

Players struggling with this skill will often try and sling the ball with one arm. Emphasise that both hands are equally important in the pass. Ensure that players swing both arms and release the ball at the correct phase in the arm swing so the ball is not looped to the next player. Often young players will also try and spin the ball when they pass. This is an advanced skill only required when passing the ball to players very far away. There is no need for junior players to spin the ball:

- Hold the ball in two hands
- Fingers should be placed parallel to the seam of the ball
- Look at the receiver for more accuracy
- Swing the arms and follow through once the ball leaves the hands
- Pass at chest height to the receiver
- Make sure players communicate with each other
- The timing of the run is crucial – make sure the receiver times the run so that he receives the pass at pace, while still remaining behind the player passing the ball.

Figure 4





## 5

### Receiving a pass

Young players can find it difficult to catch the ball because of its oval shape. They often make the mistake of snapping at the ball, which will result in the ball being knocked on:

- Keep the eyes open and focused on the ball
- Wait for the ball with hands pointing towards the direction the ball is coming from, and fingers relaxed and spread apart
- Catch the ball with soft hands (bring it into the chest gently).

Figure 5



6

### Catching and passing

When the ball is passed down the line it is important to get the ball through all the hands as quickly as possible. This will require players to catch the ball correctly and pass it on quickly to the next player, without running with the ball:

- Keep chin up, eyes open and focused on the ball
- Extend the hands and point the fingers in the direction the pass is coming from
- Catch the ball with soft hands, away from the body. Make sure players do not catch the ball against the body
- If possible, catch the ball with relaxed fingers that are placed parallel to the seam of the ball
- Look at the target area and, in one swing of the arms ('quick hands'), pass the ball to the next player
- Pass at chest height to the receiver
- For this skill, it is crucial that players develop peripheral vision (see the Activities section on page 25).

7

### Falling and popping

Although this skill does not intentionally get performed on the field, it combines falling to the ground and popping the ball to a supporting player. Falling to the ground often happens when tackled. Players should get used to falling and hitting the ground. This will help develop safe technique and avoid injury when getting tackled during a match:

- Always run with the ball in two hands
- Twist sideways and fall on the hard parts of the body, keeping the ball in both hands
- While on the ground, make eye contact with a player running towards you
- Pop the ball by pushing it away from the body towards the target area (chest height) of the receiver.

Figure 6





## 8

### Making or taking contact

Contact is unavoidable in rugby, but the most effective body position in contact is also the safest. Emphasise that if the head is not kept up ('chin off chest') at all times, and if the back is bent when entering a contact situation, the player is at greater risk of injury:

- Focus on the contact zone of the opposition
- Keep the chin off the chest and eyes open at all times
- Keep a low body position with shoulders above hips and a straight back
- Use small steps on approach
- Take a wide 'power' step into contact
- Place the front foot close to the opponent's feet
- Make contact side-on with the hard parts of the body (shoulders and hips)
- Maintain a low base, chin off chest and eyes open
- Shield the ball away from the opposition
- Make sure players aim low and drive up (a good way to teach this is to get players to touch the ground before the tackle so that they focus on driving up).

Figure 7a



Figure 7b



Figure 7c





**9**

## Tackling

If tackling is not performed correctly, players are at a high risk of injury. So it is extremely important to coach a safe and effective tackling technique. Emphasise that the head must be placed behind the player ('cheek to cheek') when tackling from the side. When tackling from the front it is important to look at the player to make sure that contact is made with the shoulder and not the head.

Players should be constantly reminded of these key points:

- Approach the ball carrier in a pre-tackle stance (ie. sink hips and lean upper body into contact)
- Always keep the chin up and off the chest, eyes open, back straight and a low body position.

### Side-on tackling

- Focus the eyes on the target area (the trunk of the ball carrier)
- Do not wait for the ball carrier. Move forward and make contact with head behind the ball carrier's body ('cheek to cheek')
- Wrap the arms around the body of the ball carrier
- Continue with a power drive to complete the tackle.

### Front-on tackling

- Focus the eyes on the target area (the soft part of the ball carrier's body, ie. his midsection)
- Do not wait for the ball carrier. Move forward and make contact with the shoulder against the target area (his midsection)
- Lock the arms around the ball carrier
- Continue with a power drive to complete the tackle on top of the ball carrier (see Figure 7a, b, c on page 15).

**10**

## Draw and pass

During attack, contact should be avoided at all times. It is better to beat the defence by distributing the ball to a man in space. To ensure that the defence is not able to tackle the player the ball is getting passed to, the passer of the ball will have to successfully draw the opposition defender. This will allow the team mate receiving the ball to continue the attack without being tackled immediately. Timing is crucial. A correctly timed pass will make it impossible for the defender to touch the player receiving the ball.

- Run straight at a defender while holding the ball in two hands
- Look at the receiver to assist the accuracy of the pass
- Make sure that the defender commits to the ball carrier
- Once the defender commits to the ball carrier, the ball carrier should pass to a team mate in a better position
- Pass at chest height slightly in front of the receiver so that the receiver can run onto the ball without slowing down.



11

## The sidestep

When there are no players to pass the ball to, the attacker should try and avoid being tackled. One of the ways to avoid being tackled, and to avoid contact, is to try and beat the defender with a step. The point of the sidestep is to change direction suddenly, so as to wrong-foot the defender. When this is done correctly players will often be able to beat defenders without being tackled. Timing is crucial in the sidestep, but getting it right comes with practice and experience.

- Run towards a defender with the ball in two hands
- Shorten running stride for timing and balance
- Change direction close to the defender by pushing sideways powerfully off the right foot to go left, and off the left foot to go right
- Accelerate and take advantage of the defender's hesitation.

## Unit skills

It is also important that the players are coached on the unit skills required during matches. These unit skills include scrumming, lineouts, mauling and rucking. These are all contact phases of the game and potentially dangerous if not coached correctly.

1

## The scrum

When referees blow their whistle for a minor infringement, the game restarts with a scrum. In the 15-man game (U11 onwards) eight players from each side push against each other in a very structured way. For younger players in a 10-man game, the scrum is not contested and players do not push against each other. It is, however, important that they still get taught how to scrum. This will help them when contested scrums are introduced at an U11 game.

At the start of a scrum, the referee must call 'crouch', followed by 'touch', followed by 'pause', and lastly 'engage'. Each call has a specific meaning, which the players have to follow to ensure their safety.



**Crouch:** All players should be crouched and ready to scrum.

**Touch:** The two props from each team should touch and continue to hold the shoulder of the opposing prop with their outside arms.

**Pause:** This is to ensure that all players are balanced and correctly prepared to scrum.

**Engage:** This signals players to come together.

### Building the scrum

- The hooker stands on the mark with knees and hips slightly bent. The hooker should lift his arms to allow the props to bind on the shorts at the level of his hips. The loosehead prop (on the left) should bind on the right hip, and the tighthead prop (on the right) should bind on the left hip. Once the props have bound tightly the hooker should lower his arms and bind to the jersey under the armpits of the props
- Once they are comfortably bound, they should square up and ensure that their feet, shoulders and hips are aligned
- The front row should crouch as a unit with their weight on the balls of their feet and heads up
- The locks should bind firmly together while the front row is in this crouched position. Once bound they should squat onto their haunches and put their heads between the props and the hooker, and bind around the waists of their respective props. The locks should be square with feet parallel and heads up (chin off chest)
- At this stage, if an eight-man scrum is being formed (U11-onwards), the three loose forwards (two flanks and an eighth man) should also bind. The flanks bind onto the shorts of the locks and they place their shoulders against the upper thighs of their respective props. The eighth man binds onto the pants of the lock in front of him and he places his head between the two locks.

Figure 8a



Figure 8b





## Teaching young players to scrum

The scrum is a very technical set piece that requires the co-ordinated forward movement of all the forwards. It is best to teach young players to drive forward in the scrum by breaking the skill down and having the players drive against each other. Pair the two props up and get them to assume a low body position (low centre of gravity) while driving against each other. Repeat with each position and slowly build the scrum up (get the front row to scrum against another front row etc).

### Pre-engagement

- Players should line-up according to the referee's call
- The front rows should be a safe distance apart, crouched and bound
- Feet, hips and shoulders should all be square
- The knees and hips must be bent
- The shoulders must be above the hips at all times
- The head up and off the chest at all times
- The back straight ('spine in line')
- Eyes should be focused on the target area
- Weight should be off the heels and on the balls of the feet
- Players must bind tightly and the scrum needs to be steady, in a low crouch position. Be aware that young players often neglect a tight bind and a low body position.



### Engagement

- Players should drive from a low crouched position upwards
- The loosehead should bind onto the middle of the tighthead's lower back
- The tighthead binds onto the middle of the opposing loosehead's lower back
- Players should bind together tightly with firm grips until the scrum is complete.

Common errors in the scrum often include players not binding correctly and not binding tightly enough. Also ensure that the front row is square and, very importantly, that the hips are below the line of the shoulders. Coaches must emphasise the importance of a straight back ('spine in line') in the scrum.

2

## The lineout

When the ball (or a player carrying the ball) goes out of the field of play the game is restarted with a lineout. Normally the hooker throws the ball into the lineout and the forwards, forming the lineout, jump to catch the ball.

Lineouts can either be uncontested, in the case of U7 to U10 players, or contested for U11 and older players. When uncontested, the team throwing the ball into the lineout must gather the ball, and the opposition team can't interfere or try and catch the ball. In contested lineouts (U11 onwards), the ball is thrown into the lineout and both teams can attempt to jump and catch the ball. So it is important to communicate where the ball is going (without the opposition hearing or knowing), and to time the throw and the jump correctly.

### Throwing the ball into the lineout

When players throw the ball into the lineout, make sure that the ball is thrown into the middle of the lineout and not directly towards their own team's line. This is not allowed and the referee will award a lineout or scrum to the opposition team if the ball is thrown in skew.

- The ball can either be thrown into the lineout overhead or from between the legs. Throwing the ball overhead is very challenging and requires a great amount of power and coordination. Throwing the ball from between the legs is easier and should be encouraged for those who struggle to throw the ball overhead
- Use two hands when throwing overhead. Spread fingers on the ball and hold directly above the head. Move elbows forward for the throw. The power is generated by the wrists and forearm
- When throwing using the underarm technique, hold the ball down by the thighs. While leaning forward, move the elbows forward for the throw. The power is generated from the swing of the arms and the motion of the waist.

### Jumping in the lineout

- When jumping for the ball it is important to keep one's eyes on the ball at all times
- Bend the hips and knees and power upwards at the right time to catch the ball
- Jump with fingers pointing upwards and palms towards the hooker
- Catch the ball with soft hands.

### Teaching young players the lineout

The lineout is a very technical set piece which requires the coordinated movement of all the forward players. It is best to teach young players this skill by breaking it down and then building it into a full lineout again. Get the loose-head prop, lock and tight-head prop, or the lock and two flankers, to line up and have the hooker throw the ball in. Ensure that there is communication and that the timing is correct.



Figure 10a



Figure 10b



### 3 The maul

A maul is formed when a player from the attacking team who is carrying the ball is held by one or more opponents. One or more of the player's own team mates also attach themselves to the player so that at least three players from either team are in contact together. For the attacking team, the objective is to move the ball towards the try line. For the defensive team, the objective is to engage in the maul to stop the attacking team from moving forward. They try and gain possession of the ball through stealing it from the attackers. The difference between the maul and the ruck is that the ball is not on the ground but in the hand.

- When a ball carrier is held he should turn his back to the opposition to assist the formation of a maul
- The first support player should bind onto the ball to help protect the ball
- The second and third support players anchor the maul on either side of the ball carrier
- All support players should assume a low and effective driving position and maintain a strong forward leg drive using short steps
- Ensure there are a balanced number of support players on the left and right hand side of the ball carrier
- Always enter the maul from behind while running parallel to the touchline. Players must always join from behind the hind-most feet
- The ball should be transferred backwards and delivered to the scrumhalf once the maul has lost momentum
- Players should drive first and seek for the ball second
- Communication is crucial for determining the position of the ball and attacking options.

Players should always have 'spine in line' and chin off chest when entering or pushing in a maul. Mauls will not be successful if players arrive too late, do not commit to the maul or fail to communicate adequately.

Figure 11





## 4

### The ruck

A ruck is formed when one or more players from each team are on their feet and in physical contact over the ball (with a minimum number of two players). This happens when a player has been tackled. The objective of a ruck is to engage and secure the ball so that the attack can continue. If the attacking team does not secure the ball fast enough by committing players to the ruck, the defensive team will steal the ball.

- Players joining the ruck must approach from behind the ruck and enter parallel to the touchline
- Players should bind with team mates before entering the ruck and then drive forward until they have passed the ball
- Players should stay on their feet at all times
- The ball can be rucked backwards and made available to other players
- Players should always enter the ruck with the chin off the chest and 'spine in line'.

The ball carrier must place the ball correctly. The ball should be placed away from the body with the tackled player's back towards the defending team. This will help to make the ball available and to prevent the defending team from stealing the ball. It is also important to remind players that they can't enter the ruck from the side. A ruck can only be entered from the back.

Figure 12





## Activities

All the activities below can be used to help you design practices for your team. See the diagrams for more instruction on how to run each activity. As you grow in experience and knowledge you'll be able to modify some of these activities and make them more challenging and more exciting for the players. Pay very close attention to the proper technique for each activity.

### Activity summary

The table below shows all the activities that will be explained in the following section, indicating which skills can be taught using each activity.

Drill letter and name	Picking up the ball	Placing the ball	Popping the ball	Passing the ball	Receiving a pass	Catching and passing	Falling and popping	Making contact	Side-on tackling	Front-on tackling	Draw and pass	The sidestep	Peripheral vision	Handing off
A. Picking and placing	✓	✓												
B. Pop and receive			✓		✓									
C. Lateral pass				✓	✓									
D. Banana run						✓								
E. Running into space					✓									
F. Pass down the line						✓								
G. Fall and pop							✓							
H. Making contact								✓						
I. Side-on tackle									✓					
J. Front-on tackle										✓				
K. Draw and pass											✓			
L. Peripheral vision						✓							✓	
M. Sidestep												✓		
N. Handing off												✓		✓



## Specific handling skills



### Picking and placing

This activity is useful for teaching young players to pick up and place the rugby ball.

#### Set up

- You will need four cones or appropriate markers and two to four balls
- Make a square out of the cones (5 m X 5 m).

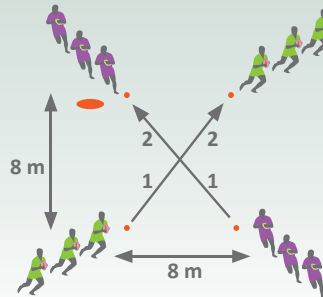
#### How to do the activity

- Divide players into four groups and place each group at a cone
- Start the grid with two balls, 2 m in front of adjacent cones (see diagram).
- Instruct the first players from the cones with the balls placed in front of them to run, pick the ball up with two hands and place it, again using two hands, 2 m before the opposite cone. Once completed, a player from the opposite cone should continue and do the same in a relay fashion.

#### Progression

- Add extra balls so that there are four balls in the grid (U8 to U13)
- Encourage players to run faster until they are at a sprint (U11 to U13)
- Instruct players to run to the middle and then step and change direction, placing the ball again at one of the adjacent cones (U11 to U13).

Figure 13





## Pop and receive

This activity is useful for teaching players to pop and catch the ball.

### Set up

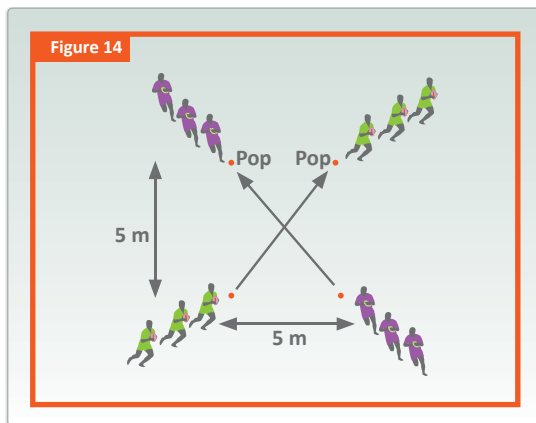
- You will need four cones and two to four balls
- Make a square using the cones (5 m X 5 m).

### How to do the activity

- Divide the players into four groups and place each group at a cone
- Start the grid with two balls. Give two adjacent groups a ball each
- Instruct the first players, from the groups with balls, to run with the ball to the opposite cone and pop the ball to the player at the front of the opposite group.  
The player receiving the ball should then continue to do the same.

### Progression

- Add more balls so that there are four balls in the grid
- Encourage players to receive the pop while running and not wait for the ball on their cone
- Encourage players to run as fast as possible with the ball in hand
- Once players master all the basics, introduce the rule that they can't pass forward only backwards.





## Lateral pass

This drill helps develop handling skills such as lateral passing and catching the ball.

### Set up

- You will need four cones and two to four balls
- Make a square out of the four cones (5 m X 5 m).

### How to do the activity

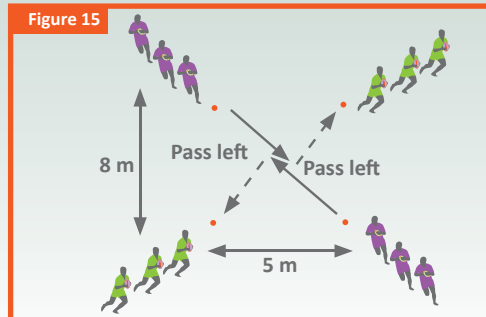
- Divide the players into four groups and place each group at a cone
- Start the grid with two balls. Give two opposite groups a ball each
- Instruct the first players, from the groups with balls, to run to the middle of the grid and pass the ball to the group to the left
- The groups receiving the balls should do the same
- All passes should be passed backwards
- After passing the ball, players should continue running to the opposite cone
- Alternate between passing left and passing right.

### Progression

- Add more balls, so that there are four balls in the grid
- Once players get the hang of it, encourage players to run as fast as possible with the ball in hand
- Change the grid slightly so that players run to the cone they had passed to and not to the opposite cone.



Figure 15





## Banana run

This activity is suitable for U11 to U13 onwards, and can be used to teach catching and passing while running.

### Set up

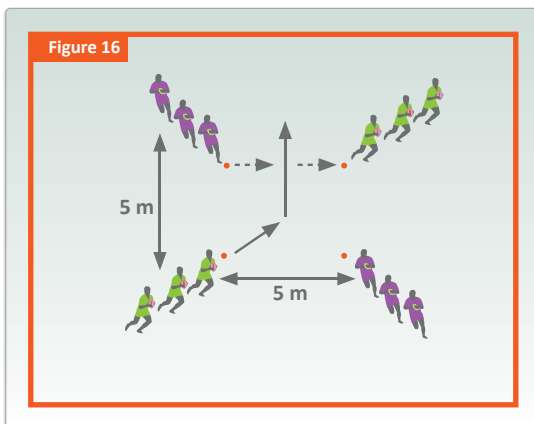
- You will need four cones and two to four balls
- Place four cones on each point of a square (5 m X 5 m).

### How to do the activity

- Divide the players into four groups and place each group at a cone
- Instruct the front player from one group to run to the centre of the grid, then change direction ('straighten the line') and run perpendicularly to the opposite and adjacent cones (see diagram)
- The player should receive a pass from the stationary player from an adjacent cone and pass the ball again ('quick hands') to a player in the opposite group
- The players from the adjacent group, which just passed the ball, should then run a similar angle, receiving a pass and then passing it again
- Once players have completed their angled run and catch and pass, they should join the opposite cone's group
- If no mistakes are made, this drill can continue indefinitely.

### Progression

- Add another ball to the grid. Start the grid with a ball at two opposite ends
- Make the square bigger or smaller to work on receiving and passing longer or shorter passes.





## Running into space

### Set up

- Form a 10 m x 10 m grid using four cones.

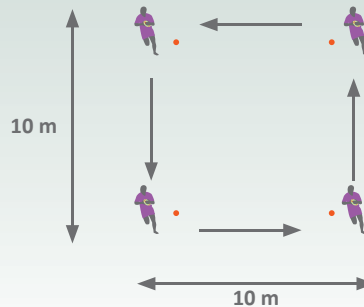
### How to do the activity

- Divide players into groups of four and place one player at each cone
- One player starts with the ball, passes it to a player and follows his pass
- Once he gets to the receiver, he needs to touch the ground at the foot of the receiver before returning back to his cone

### Progression

- Pass in one direction and run in the other direction
- Do the same activity with three players: The ball continues along its original path with the non-passing player adjacent to the gap running to the empty corner to receive the pass.

Figure 17





## Pass down the line

This activity develops the skill of catching and passing while running.

### Set up

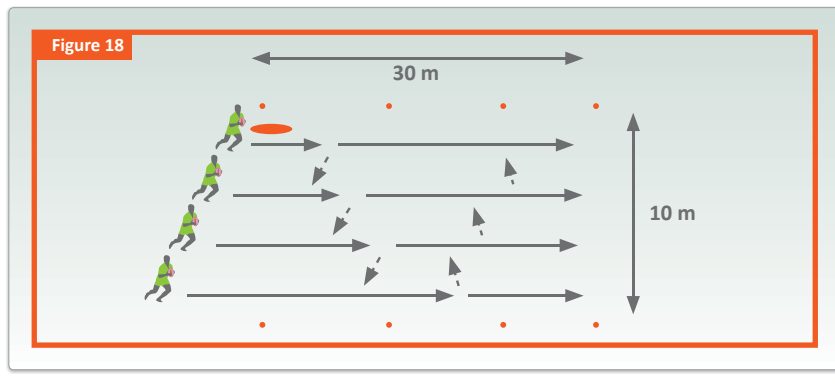
- You will need eight cones and four balls (or more if available)
- The eight cones or markers should be used to form a channel (30 m long and 10 m wide).

### How to do the activity

- Divide all players into groups of four at the start of the channel
- The groups should line up as shown in the figure below
- Give each group a ball
- Each group should run the length of the channel, passing the ball down their line
- Instruction should be given to pass the ball down the line twice over the distance of a 30 m channel.

### Progression

- Players should be encouraged to catch and pass the ball immediately ('quick hands') so the ball can be passed down the line more than two times
- The distance of the channel can be increased up to the length of the available field
- Once players get the hang of it, encourage them to run faster until they are sprinting (U11 to U13)
- The coach could also place two channels next to each other and make it a race between two groups (U11 to U13).





## Fall and pop (or place)

This activity helps develop the skill of falling and popping the ball.

### Set up

- You will need eight cones (or markers) and four balls (or more if available)
- The eight cones should be used to form a channel (30 m long and 10 m wide).

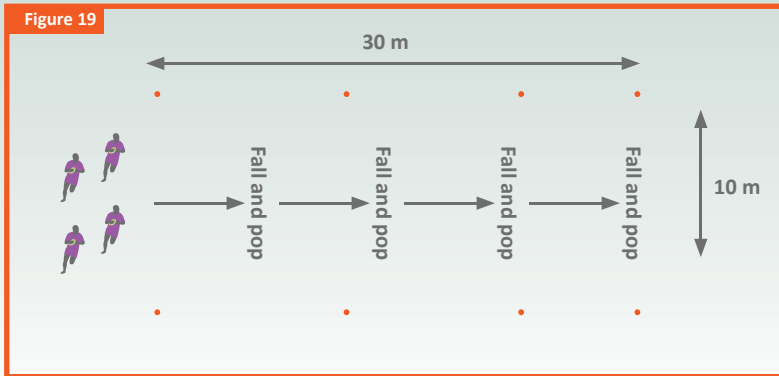
### How to do the activity

- Divide all players into groups of four at the start of the channel
- Give one player in the group a ball
- They should run no more than two metres and fall with the ball to mimic a tackle
- While lying on the ground they should pop the ball to a player calling to receive the ball
- The receiver should then run another two metres before falling and repeating the cycle
- This should continue until the end of the grid is reached.

### Progression

- The distance of the channel can be increased up to the length of the available field
- Players can be encouraged to run faster until they are at a sprint (U11 to U13)
- The coach could also place two channels next to each other and make it a race between two groups (U11 to U13).

Figure 19





## Specific defensive and attacking skills



### Making contact

This activity helps develop the skill of making contact.

#### Set up

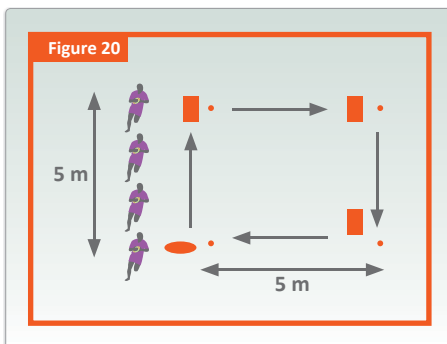
- You will need four cones, two balls (or more if available) and three contact shields (if available)
- The four cones or markers should be used to form a grid (5 m x 5 m).

#### How to do the activity

- Allow three players holding contact shield to stand at three corners of the grid, as shown in the diagram below. (If there are no contact shields available, the players on the cones can simply stand with their forearms protecting their chest and stomach)
- The remaining players should line up behind the unoccupied cone
- One player at a time should run, with the ball in two hands, and make contact with the players at the cones
- Run around the grid clockwise and then change and run anticlockwise
- Very important: The first time players are introduced to this drill, make everyone walk very slowly. Once they have mastered the techniques, they can start to jog. Only after mastering the technique should they jog into contact.

#### Progression

- When contact shields are available ask players to run into the bag and try to dominate the contact situation (U11 to U13)
- Instruct players to make contact and then fall to the ground and place the ball (U11 to U13).





## Side-on tackle

This activity develops the skill of side-on tackling.

### Set up

- You will need eight cones and four balls (or more if available)
- The eight cones or markers should be used to form a channel (30 m long and 10 m wide).

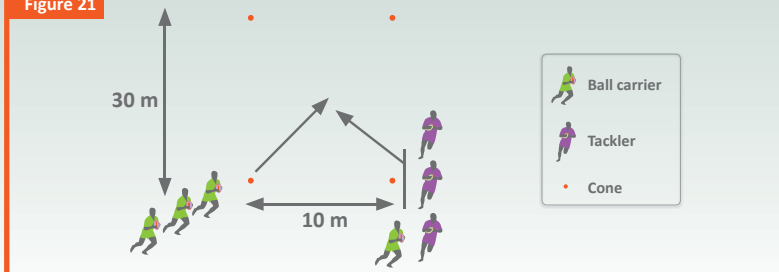
### How to do the activity

- Divide all players into two equal groups and line them up behind two adjacent cones, as shown in the diagram
- Make one of the groups the ball carriers and the other group the tacklers
- The ball carriers should run (see progression) across the grid to the opposite cone
- The tacklers should tackle the ball carriers side-on. Allow all players equal opportunity to tackle and to carry the ball
- Also allow the tackle to happen from both sides
- Always make sure that players are equally matched for size. An easy way to do this is to make both groups line up according to height or weight
- Very important: The first time players are introduced to this drill, make everyone walk very slowly. Once they have mastered the techniques they can start to jog slowly. Only after mastering the technique while jogging slowly should they be asked to jog into contact (U11 to U13).

### Progression

- Increase speed of activity (U11 to U13)
- The ball carriers can be given certain evasion options (ie a power step into contact, a hand-off or a sidestep).

Figure 21





## Front-on tackle

This activity develops the skill of front-on tackling.

### Set up

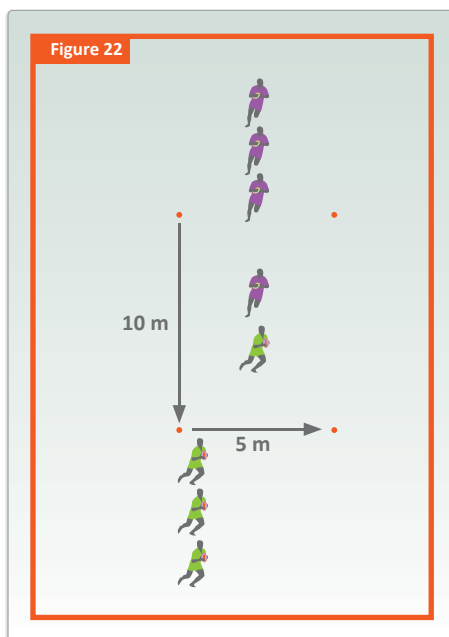
- You will need four cones and four balls (or more if available)
- The four cones or markers should be used to form a channel (10 m long and 5 m wide).

### How to do the activity

- Divide all players into two equal groups and line them up behind two adjacent cones, as shown in the diagram
- Make one of the groups the ball carriers and the other group the tacklers
- The ball carriers and the tacklers run towards each other and meet at the centre of the channel
- The tacklers should tackle the ball carriers as they run down the line
- Allow all players equal opportunity to tackle and to carry the ball
- Always ensure that players are equally matched for size
- Ensure that players protect and do not lose the ball in the tackle
- Ensure that the tacklers use correct form and that the ball carriers fall with correct technique (see pages 15 - 17 for more details)
- Very important: The first-time players are introduced to this drill, make everyone walk very slowly. Once they have mastered the techniques they can start to jog slowly. Only after mastering the technique while jogging slowly should they jog into contact (U11 to U13).

### Progression

- Increase the speed of the skill.





## Draw and pass

This activity develops the skills of drawing and passing.

### Set up

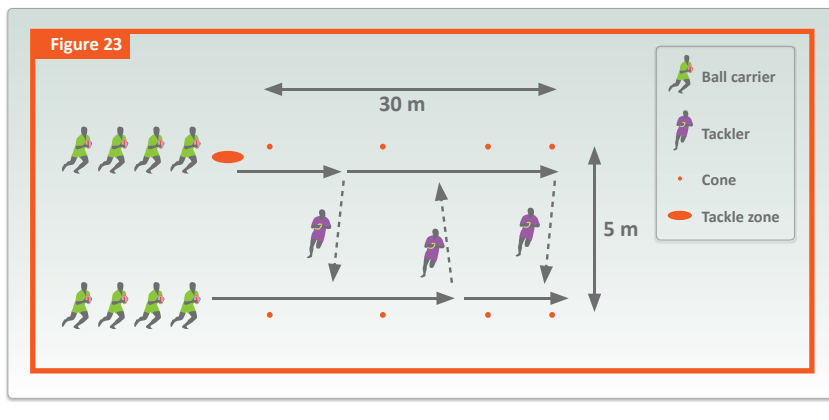
- You will need eight cones and four balls (or more if available)
- The eight cones should be used to form a channel (30 m long and 10 m wide).

### How to do the activity

- Place three players equal distances apart in the channel, as shown in the diagram
- Align the remaining players into two rows at the start of the channel
- The three players in the middle are the defenders. It is their job to perform a two-handed touch on a ball carrier. They can however only move sideways
- The two groups of players at the start of the channel are the attackers and it is their job to 'draw' the defenders (ie. pass the ball without being touched, and protect the player being passed to from being touched)
- Two attackers, one from each group, should go and pass the ball between them without being touched with the ball.

### Progression

- Decrease the width of the channel (U11 to U13)
- Change the two-handed touch to a one-handed touch to make it more challenging for the attackers (U11 to U13).





## Peripheral vision

### Set up

- Create a 4 m x 4 m grid.

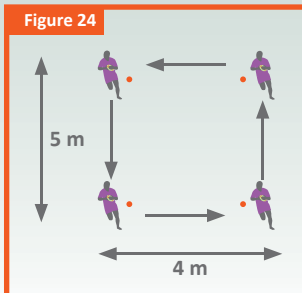
### How to do the activity

- Divide the players into groups of four
- Have each player stand on a corner of the grid with their backs facing each other (facing outwards)
- One player has a ball and passes it to the player on the left. The player catches the ball and passes it to the next player.

### Progression

- Increase the distance between players
- Increase the number of balls
- Players can pass in either direction.

Figure 24



The players should be facing away from each other so that their backs point towards the centre of the square.



## Sidestep and evasion

This activity develops the skill of evasive running or sidestepping.

### Set up

- You will need eight cones and four balls (or more if available)
- The eight cones should be used to form a channel (30 m long and 10 m wide).

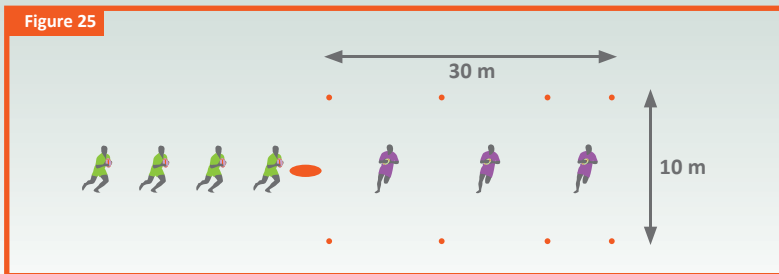
### How to do the activity

- Place three players equal distances apart in the channel (see diagram)
- Align the remaining players (attackers) into one row at the start of the channel
- The three players in the middle are the defenders. It is their job to perform a two-handed touch on a ball carrier
- The defenders can only move sideways. The group of attackers should run forward and try and beat the defenders by performing a sidestep
- The attackers should try and run all the way through the channel without being touched.

### Progression

- Make the width of the channel smaller (U11 to U13)
- The coach could also change the two-handed touch to a one-handed touch, which will make it more challenging for the attackers (U11 to U13).

Figure 25





## Handing off

### Set up

- Divide players into pairs and ensure that they are approximately the same size and weight
- Each pair has a ball.

### How to do the activity

- One player is the defender, the other is the attacker and holds a ball
- The attacking player runs towards the defender
- The attacker places the ball in the arm furthest away from the defender
- The attacker then extends the arm closest to the defender, keeps his elbow slightly bent and his hand flat on the defender's chest
- He pushes the defender away by pushing off with the foot that is closest to him
- He then accelerates away from the opponent.

### Progression

- This is an advanced technique, so have young players walk through the technique and gradually increase speed
- At a later stage, the defender can try to tackle the attacker and knock the ball out of his hand.

## The Warm-down

It is tempting to finish your training sessions with a short match. However, a good way to wrap up the session is a light warm-down, which involves reinforcing the key skills and aspects of that session. Part of the warm-down consists of some stretches with the ball, while the rest is a review of the skills that have been learned. You can also give homework so that one of the skills you taught that day can be practised at home. This can consist of developing one of the skills you've taught that day, such as passing, running and kicking skills. For more on the warm-down please see the General coaching manual.

## Putting it together

To put the practice session together we gave a number of examples of drills and activities you could choose from. These are guidelines only and you should feel free to adapt the drills and create new ones depending on your players.



## Evaluation

One of the most important things you will naturally learn to do as a coach is evaluate your players. At every practice session you will watch and observe, looking for players who are learning the skills and those who are battling with certain concepts.

For you to be a successful coach it is extremely important that you constantly notice which of the players is battling with skills so that you can address their struggles early. The typical problems encountered will include difficulty in executing the key components of a skill, and a tendency to fall back into bad habits (like forgetting 'spine in line' or 'chin off chest' when entering contact situations).

The checklist is really a summary of some of the key coaching points that were explained in detail in the skills and activities sections earlier. We recommend that you pay very close attention to all those skill descriptions, but use this checklist as a quick evaluation for individual players.

## Checklist

<b>Fundamental (U8 to U10)</b>	
• My players can pass a rugby ball sideways with two hands while running	
• My players can catch a rugby ball with two hands without hugging the ball to their bodies while running	
• My players are able to place their heads in the correct safe position when tackling	
• My players are confident when taking contact	
• My players are able to keep a straight back and neck 'spine in line'	
<b>Learn to practice and play (U11 to U13)</b>	
• My players can make effective decisions while running with the ball	
• My players are able to gain possession in the tackle situation	
• My forwards are able to scrum in a coordinated manner, or my backline players are able to distribute the ball and create space	
• My players are able to catch the balls kicked to them	
• My players are able to contest for the ball during rucks and mauls	



## Appendix: Rules, positions and equipment

### Managing a game

Matches are controlled by a referee on the field of play, and two assistant referees (also known as linesmen) who patrol the sidelines and help the referee.

### Scoring

- Five points are awarded when a try is scored
- Two points are awarded for a conversion – a kick over the goals after a try has been scored (U11 to U13 only)
- Three points are awarded for a penalty drop kick (U11 to U13 only).

### Foul play

Any foul or dangerous play should be penalised. If intentional or repeated, the player should be sent off the field (to the 'sin bin') for a certain period of time (5 - 10 minutes), or be suspended for the rest of the game.

When the rules have been infringed, the referee blows his whistle and allows the game to be restarted, either as a scrum (for a forward pass or knock on), as a lineout (for going out of the field of play) or as a tap or penalty kick. When the game is restarted, the team that was defending is given possession of the ball.

### Penalties and free kicks

Penalties are awarded for various rule infringements and offences, such as:

- Offside
- High tackle (a dangerous tackle above the shoulders)
- Holding onto the ball when on the ground.

#### **U8 to U10**

- Once a penalty kick is awarded the opponents must move back 5 m
- The team receiving the penalty kick can restart with a tap kick.

#### **U11 to U13**

- Once a penalty kick is awarded, the opponents must move back 10 m
- The team receiving the penalty kick can restart with a tap kick
- A penalty kick can also be kicked directly into touch
- Players can choose to try and kick a penalty over the poles for three points.

Free kicks can also be awarded, but this is up to the discretion of the referee. A free kick is not allowed to be kicked out directly. If it is kicked out, the defending team gets awarded the lineout.

When a penalty kick is kicked into touch, the team which kicked it into touch is awarded the lineout.



## Positions

In these age groups, it is recommended that all players try the different positions – specialisation is not recommended at this point.

Rugby is played between two teams. In the U7 to U10 age category, teams are made up of 10 players on each side. Substitutions are allowed, and teams can be made up of a squad of a maximum of 15 players.

In the U11 to U13 age category, rugby is played with 15 players on each side, with a maximum of 22 players in the squad.

All players should play no less than half a match so that everyone gets a chance to play.

Forwards (Forward players) + Backs (Backline players)

### U8 to U10

- Five forwards (for scrums and lineouts)
- One scrumhalf and four backline players (form the backline)
- All players should be encouraged to play with the ball.

### U11 to U13

- Players need to be placed according to the physical demands of the position, but should still be encouraged to experience different positions
- Eight forwards (whose main aim is to gain possession of the ball)
- One scrumhalf and six backline players (whose main aim is to attack with the ball)
- The forwards and backs should work together at all times
- Both forwards and backs should be allowed to run and pass the ball, although the backline should predominantly be used to run with the ball.



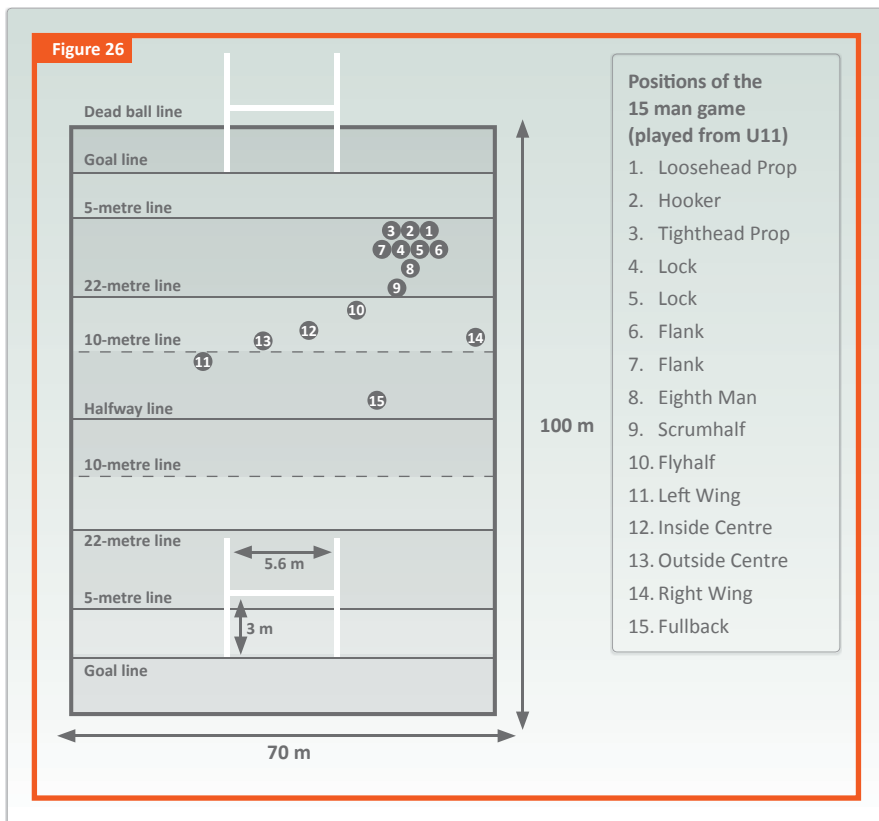
## Playing field

The full 15-man game (U11 onwards) should be played on a full-length rugby field (roughly 100 m long and 45-50 m wide), which is preferably well covered with grass. A set of rugby poles should be placed at each try line (see Figure 26).

The 10-a-side game (U7 to U10) may be played on the same ground, but use only half the field.

The try line and halfway line of a full field should be used as the touch lines, and the touch line of the full field should be made the try lines. Two matches can run simultaneously on one full-sized field.

No poles are required during these 10-a-side matches.





## Equipment

The game is played with a rugby ball (oval-shaped). Different sized balls are available for different age groups.

Figure 27



### Ball sizes

- Children under nine use a size 3 ball
- Children aged 9 to 12 use a size 4 ball

### Your coaching sessions will also need:

- A whistle
- Cones
- Balls
- Bibs
- Contact shields or tackle bags.

The basic essential equipment for young players includes a rugby jersey, rugby shorts and a gum guard. Young players should not be allowed to play rugby without a gum guard because it protects the teeth and can prevent concussion. Other equipment that players might choose to wear include shoulder pads and headgear. These guards, including headgear, are not essential and have not been proven to reduce the risk of injury. Players should not wear anything that is dangerous to themselves or another player, such as jewellery or watches.

Discovery has endeavoured to ensure that all the information contained in this manual is accurate and based on credible clinical and scientific research. Discovery cannot however, be held responsible for any injury, loss or damages that may result from reliance on the information, and by utilising the information you specifically waive any claim you may have against Discovery in this regard. You are advised that each individual has their own unique clinical make-up and while the lesson plans were designed with all individuals in mind, some may respond differently to others. You are therefore advised to take due caution when participating in any of the activities recommended.







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