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Rebecca Harbison

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Tackling the Rules of Rugby

Rebecca Harbison

Rugby, Sports, CHAT Analysis, Logistics, Women's Team

Background

RUGBY is a European sport that was created in 1823. The sport was mainly popular in places like England, Scotland, and Ireland. The sport did not become popular in the US until the 1970's. I was introduced to the sport of rugby just last semester and fell in love with it. I've only played five games total in my entire life but I love playing it so much I want to get better and better at it each day. This is why I am writing this activity system analysis on the sport of rugby. I felt like if I wrote my paper on rugby, I could learn more about it logistically which in turn can hopefully make me a better player on the field.

Objective

The objective of the game is to press the ball onto the opposing teams try line. The tryline in rugby is the equivalent to the touchdown zone in football. Football is actually just like rugby but lamer and with bulkier gear. A try in total is worth seven points. The try itself is worth five points and the kick into the goal post is two points. Both teams get a one-minute water break while a player from the scoring team tries to kick the ball between the uprights, or goal posts, for two conversion points. A conversion is the term for the kick after a try. Members of the opposing team are allowed to run from the try line as an attempt to intimidate the kicker into missing the kick. An equivalent to this is yelling "hey batter batter batter" in baseball to throw off the batter. The other team does not always try to intimidate the kicker though. Sometimes, the other team is busy getting water and listening to a coach or captain.

Subject

I joined the women's rugby team at my school last semester. I first heard about the team at my school's admitted students day back in April that year. One of the coaches, who is also a kinesiology professor, was giving a presentation for my major. It wasn't until on the drive back home I was thinking about what she said about the team at the presentation where I was considering what it would be like if I joined the team. I brought it up to my mom in the car and she gave me a nervous laugh and said "ok sweetie". I don't think she really thought I would join and didn't want me to. She was afraid of all the injuries I could get and I could lose all my teeth or something. I decided to join because I wanted to build up my confidence in being able to defend myself. I felt like nothing bad can happen to me if I gained the strength to physically defend myself. This is only my second semester playing but I've loved playing and playing with the people on the team so much I wanna keep going.

Rules

Rugby has some very strict rules about the game. One of the fundamental rules of the game is that you cannot pass the ball forward. To pass the ball, you must pass the ball behind you to another teammate. If you pass the ball forward for any reason, it causes a penalty which causes the opposing team to get possession of the ball and your team has to run back ten meters. When you run back ten meters, you have to make sure you run with your team and never turn around from the opposing team. When the other team has possession of the ball in a penalty, they do not have to wait for you to run back ten. They can tap and go whenever they are ready so turning around just gives them even more of an advantage. Staying with your team makes sure there isn't a break in the line. This isn't a rule but it is a strategy best used in the case of a penalty. Having a good line is very important factor in rugby. In this case, a flat straight line is the best defensive strategy because it prevents most of the players on the opposing team from breaking through.

They are also strict on plays that are considered "dangerous plays". In the official rule book, there is a section of foul play called dangerous play. Dangerous play is plays that can harm all the players involved in the play. An example of dangerous play is high tackling. High tackling is tackling a player above the chest or their head. Tackling this high can cause serious injuries for the player getting tackled. If the referee sees this, the player will get a yellow card and be out of the game for 10 minutes. If the player keeps doing dangerous plays, they will receive a red card and will be sent off the field and unable to come back. The real disadvantage to players getting a yellow or a red card is that the player cannot have a sub play for them which means the team will be forced to play down a player.

Another big rule of rugby is respect. This goes for everyone in the game especially the referee. This was surprising to me before I actually played rugby

thinking how violent the sport is. The only person that is allowed to respectfully ask about the ref's calls during halftime is the captain of each team. If any other player tries to talk to the ref they will be ignored. It is actually funny to watch because the game will continue and all you see is an angry player yelling at the ref and getting ignored while the player just looks like a jerk.

Tools

Part of what makes rugby so dangerous is the lack of protection used in the sport. For my team, we are required to have a mouth guard and a pair of cleats to play which left me under the impression that is how all teams worked. I learned though after watching other players play without a mouth guard that some wear scrum caps. A scrum cap is a piece of headgear that covers and protects your head. I was very confused by this which inspired me to start reading the official rule book. The rule book said all that protection was only recommended which made me more confused. I later asked one of the veteran players about this and was told that our team requires mouth guards because they protect your jaw and teeth. Mouthguards can be uncomfortable to wear but they do help protect your pearly whites. Scrum caps can be helpful for covering hair and your head but they are not mandatory because you are taught how to avoid using your head in tackles.

There are many ways to help maintain team possession of the ball. When you are running with the ball and are tackled to the ground and unable to pass the ball, one of the support runners comes up and gets into a ruck to defend the ball from the opposing team. A ruck is a shoulder battle between two players that goes over the player that is down on the ground. The player on the ground turns their body onto their team's side of the field and holds the ball for the scrummy to grab. A player cannot grab the ball if it is still underneath the ruck. The best way to describe it is in a way I heard from a ref at my first game in Reno. If a flying bird can poop on it then you can grab it. There also can be more than one person in the ruck. This can make ruck look like a giant mess but it can help your team keep possession of the ball. The other people in the ruck can help push the other team off of the ruck.

Another way of keeping possession of the ball is a scrum. Scrums happen when

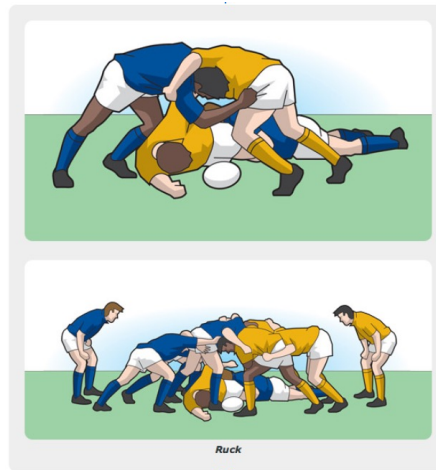


Figure 1: Ruck

there is a knock on or a penalty. A knock on is when the ball is accidentally or intentionally hit forward. A scrum is when a pack of forwards lock together to do a pushing shoulder battle with the opposing teams pack of forwards.

Scrumms differ from rucks because play will temporarily stop for players to get into scrum formation whereas in a ruck play will keep going. Once the scrum is formed, the ref will yell 'Lock bind set' which means for the forwards to lock together with the opposing forwards, bind together and set and get ready to push. Then the scrummy throws the ball into the scrum which is the cue for the forwards to push against each other to get the ball out of the scrum on their side of the field. Once the ball is out of the scrum, the scrummy grabs it and throws it out to the back line.

A third way to keep possession of the ball is to kick it off sides. It sounds weird since it's the opposite way in soccer but kicking it off sides in rugby means that your team gets to throw the ball in during the line out. A line out is where both teams have forwards lift other forwards to catch the ball thrown in by one team. The ball must be thrown back in a straight throw. If the ball is called crooked by the ref the other team will get possession of the ball.



Figure 2: Scrum



Figure 3: Line Out

Players

Players are split into two sections. The forwards and the backs. The forwards are the offensive and more muscular players. The backs can be both defensive players in forming a flat line to protect the try line and offensive players trying to break the opposing teams flat line to score on their try line. The back line players tend to be much faster at running and passing than forward players. You can tell whether a player is a forward or a back by the number on the back of their jersey. The forward players are one through eight and backs are nine through fifteen. This all adds up to the main fifteen squad on the field. There are substitutes in the game but once a player is subbed off the field they cannot reenter the game. Sometimes the players in the main squad do not wear the numbers they are assigned to because the jersey may not fit them. This is common on the team that I play for particularly the forward players since

they are usually the larger players that don't fit into the medium size jerseys. So instead they will wear some of the substitutes jerseys that are larger such as numbers twenty through twenty-nine. I like wearing the tight jerseys since I have a smaller frame and also I learned that in a game, if a player can't grab you into a tackle they will try grabbing the loose part of your jersey to swing you down to the ground. So to prevent this from happening I wear the tightest jersey I can squeeze myself into. There are many different positions between the forwards and the backs. Since I play in the backline, I will start explaining this position first.

The first player of the backline is number nine which is the scrummy or scrum half. The scrummy throws the ball out of rucks and scrums. If the scrummy is down in the ruck and cannot grab the ball out, someone has to volunteer themselves to play temporary scrummy. The second player is the number ten which is the flyhalf. The flyhalf is the support for the scrummy. The next position are the two wings. Their numbers are number eleven and fourteen. The left side wing, number eleven, plays on the opposite end of the line helping cover the weak side of the line. The right side wing plays at the very end of the line opposite from the left side wing and their job is to sprint with the ball once it gets to them. The left and right wing can alternate from game to game. The next player in the line is the number twelve which is the outside center. The outside center is in the center of the line and supports the fly half. The next position is the number thirteen which is the inside center. The inside center supports the wing if they go down or can try and break through the hole in the opposing defensive line. The final position is number fifteen which is the fullback. The fullback is the equivalent to the goalie in soccer. Their job is to run up with the line in front of them and if a player from the opposing team breaks through the line, they are the last person that has to stop them before they score.

The forward pack consists of eight players. The player numbers one and three are the props. They are the ones that are in the front of the scrum and lock in the hooker. The number two position is the hooker who is in the center that helps lead the forward pack in the scrum and throws the ball back in during the lineout. Numbers four and five are the locks. The locks go right behind the first three in the scrum to lock them in a tight bind for the scrum. They are also the ones lifted into the air for the line outs. Numbers six and seven are the flankers. The flankers are on the edge of the scrum so they can break away easily when the ball is out that way they can grab and run. The last forward position is simply called, the eighth man. The eighth man is in the back of the scrum to get the ball cleanly passed to the scrum half.

Everyone involved in making the rugby team possible is a part of the rugby team. Even the coaches that give drills to help improve certain aspects of the game including the "fun" conditioning they give to improve overall strength and speed. Conditioning workouts are workouts that are made to help strengthen different parts of our bodies such as muscle and speed. For example my coach does a conditioning workout where the team runs around the field seven times and at each half way mark of a lap we have to do seven push ups, twenty sit

ups and seven burpees. We also have trainers that help us with weight lifting. One aspect that I love about rugby is how kind and respectful everyone is to each other. Not only to our own teammates but opposing teams as well. It is a rugby tradition that after each game, the home team hosts a social with the other team where they eat, sing rugby chants that are too inappropriate for me to list in this paper, and award the opposing team's best back and best forward of the match. The social is a great way for the two teams to bond and become friendly with one another. A surprising fact I found about rugby, or just how my team specifically is, is that you cannot swear during the game. My first couple games I swore out loud when I missed a tackle or something and either one of the other players or coaches would tell me to watch my mouth. This was odd to me considering how aggressive and rough the sport is but everyone is still big on manners and respect.

Another aspect of my rugby team that I love is the team bonding that we do. The older girls are always trying to come up with new ideas for things we can do together outside of rugby. Last semester, the team started the big sis little sis mentorship program for us. The program is meant to help new people like me get adjusted to the team and help out whenever we need it. I got assigned my big at the end of last semester and she is awesome. She actually helped me review and tweak things in this paper. One of my favorite team bonding events that we have done this year was going on a hike. Not many people on the team were able to come but it was still fun with the people we had. We went to Garland Ranch in Carmel and went up to this pretty lake up the hill. The view was beautiful and the bonding activities were fun. We even went to taco bell after which was one of my favorite parts.

Conclusion

To people on the outside looking in, rugby looks like a very dangerous tiring sport that looks hard and not fun to play. For me however, rugby is an empowering and fun sport to play. Ever since I have started playing rugby, I feel stronger and more confident on things I can do and for the things I struggle with I know I can tackle them head on. Another factor that makes rugby so much fun for me is the girls that are on the team with me. These girls are some of the kindest and most supportive people I have met but they also have the strength to throw people down to the ground. I am so glad to have found this amazing stress relief outlet and to be on the team that I am on. I plan to continue playing rugby for my next four years at this school and possibly onward past university if I can find a team as awesome as my current one.

Works Cited

Figure one image source: <https://proyectosef.wordpress.com/tag/ruck/> Figure two image source: CSUMB women's rugby team photographer Figure three image source: CSUMB women's rugby team photographer