



Mini Rugby Refereeing – October 2011

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“The Big Five – Scrum, Lineout, Tackle, Ruck, Maul Refereeing Checklists”

Dear Coach/Referee,

To achieve a consistent standard of refereeing across Hong Kong Mini Rugby, we need to adopt a consistent approach. One technique to achieve this is for the coach/referee to use a common checklist while match officiating. Going forward in the season I will elaborate on each of the ‘Big Five’ checklists as well as other aspects of refereeing but for this newsletter I would like to focus on the basics of the Scrum, Lineout, Tackle, Ruck, and Maul. The reference documents are of course the “iRB – Laws of the Game Rugby Union 2011” and the “HKMRFU Summary of Playing Laws.”

- 1) **Scrum** – The laws of the game define the scrum and describe the areas of the scrum. Scrums are restart phases in the game, ordered and controlled by the referee. The referee applies the law and must guarantee safety and fair play. As the referee you must understand the objective of a scrum, the formation and engagement sequence, and how to identify offside players at the scrum.

Scrum Pre-engagement Checklist:

- The scrum is put down at the correct place – 5 metres in from the touch line (HKMRFU 3 metres),
- Eight players from each team form the scrum, if both team have 15 players (Refer HKMRFU Summary of Playing Laws for numbers in the scrum),
- Numbers in the scrum are the same for both teams (U19 Law),
- All Players are fully bound on,
- Front row with the hooker are bound correctly,
- Distance between front rows is correct,
- Heads and shoulders are above hip level,
- No crutch binding. (HKMRFU)

Scrum Engagement Checklist:

- The two front rows should form at an arm’s distance away from each other,
- The referee should not get between the front rows during the engagement process,
- The front five players on each side of the scrum should be tightly bound,
- No early charging,
- There are four phases in the engagement sequence in all games:
 - 1) Crouch – compliance
 - 2) Touch – compliance
 - 3) Pause – compliance
 - 4) Engage
- The front row should crouch, which means:
 - They crouch from the knees,
 - Props parallel to the touch line – in a pushing direction,
 - Their bodies are inclined slightly upwards,
 - Their shoulders are equal height and no lower than their hips.
- The referee should ensure that the props with their outside arms touch their opponents outside shoulders and then withdraw their arms,
- The referee should ensure there is a pause which is vital to ensure the front row players have sight of the position into which they are going,
- The referee should then invite the front rows to engage and ensure that they do not charge at each other and that they are not pulling or pushing down.

Scrum Post-engagement Checklist:

- The ball is thrown in straight down the centre line,
- The ball is not twisted towards the attacking side,
- The ball lands beyond the width of the nearest prop’s shoulders,
- All forwards remain bound correctly until the scrum has ended,
- The defending backs do not creep up offside,
- Excessive wheeling does not take place (U19s – not more than 45°)
- No more than 1.5 metre push (U19 Law)

Please Note: Referees are asked to pay extra attention to their management of the scrum at the U19 level. The game at this level demands special safety measures, which are part of the laws of the game, also included in the

HKMRFU Summary of Laws. Referees are asked to communicate these age appropriate changes clearly and adopt a referee/coaching role depending on the level of the teams. Listed below is an overview of the special regulations applying to U19 rugby, but please also consult the “HKMRFU Summary of Playing Laws”:

- No push beyond 1.5 metres,
- No deliberate wheel,
- Wheel beyond 45° reset – same side throw in,
- No.8 must pack between the two locks – No.4 & No.5

Please Note: A positive scrum will be **square** to the touchline. Players will have **flat backs** and will be pushing on a **horizontal** plane with no downward or upward pressure. All the participants will be **tightly bound**. When the front row players engage, they will **lead in together**. When engaged the props will be looking for **high arch grips** on their opposition players.

HKMRFU Summary Checklist – Scrum!

- 1) **Make a Mark,**
- 2) **Where is the Ball,**
- 3) **Where are the Scrum 1/2s,**
- 4) **Check 5m Offside Lines for Back Lines,**
- 5) **Check Distance between Front Rows,**
- 6) **Check Front Row Binding,**
- 7) **Check 2nd Rows Binding,**
- 8) **Call** – “Crouch” – **Compliance,**
- 9) **Call** – “Touch” – **Compliance,**
- 10) **Call** – “Pause” – **Compliance,**
- 11) **Call** – “Engage”
- 12) **Check Front Row Binding, Square and Steady,**
- 13) **Check Other Binding,**
- 14) **Note Your Position,**
- 15) **Maintain Offside Lines.**

Note: Focus on SAFETY at all stages of the scrum, especially after engagement. If in doubt, blow up and reset the scrum!

The English RFU has put together supporting video examples of the [correct scrum engagement examples](#) and [incorrect scrum engagement examples](#).

- 2) **Lineout:** The lineout restarts the game after the ball or the ball carrier has gone into touch. The team of the opponents of the player who last held or touched the ball before it went into touch throws the ball into the lineout and the referee ensures the fair contest for the ball by managing the players through the different phases of the lineout.

Players will contest for the ball (see ‘Summary of Playing Laws’ for age variation). For the referee, it is essential to ensure a safe environment during a lineout. The lineout, with its 10 metre (U11/U12 HKMRFU 7 metres, HKMRFU U9/U10 5 metres) offside line, gives the attacking team various options and serves as an important platform from which to play the ball.

The laws of the game define the lineout and describe the areas of the lineout. Lineouts are restart phases in the game, and with the one metre gap and the ability to support jumping players (HKMRFU – no lifting variation), there appear to be relatively few problems for the referee to deal with at the lineout.

As the coach/referee you must understand the objective of a lineout, its formation and the contest after the throw-in has taken place. You must also know how to manage the participants and non-participants in a lineout.

Set and maintain the gap: In the management of the lineout, a primary duty of the coach/referee is to set and maintain the one metre gap. To do this, you will have to check every lineout for the following five focus points:

- The players in each team participating in the lineout must line up half a metre from the line of touch on their side of the line of touch so that there is a one-metre gap between them.
- If the gap is set and maintained at the correct distance, the referee/coach has better vision and the players are less likely to offend. It is easy to forget this aspect as the game proceeds and allow players to get closer. You must concentrate at each lineout to ensure the gap is maintained.
- The referee/coach will normally referee at least the first few lineouts in a match from the front, taking up position to the side of the lineout on the side of the team, which is throwing in the ball.
- There is an exception to the guideline – when a line-out takes place close to the goal line, where the referee will normally take up position in in-goal to ensure that tries and touch downs resulting from line-outs can be clearly observed.
- There are four recommended positions for new coach/referees who are learning – at the front on either side and at the back on either side.

Start and end of the lineout: The lineout starts when the ball leaves the hand of the player throwing in. The lineout ends when any of these occurs:

- The ball is tapped, passed or knocked from the line-out,
- A player carrying the ball leaves the line-out,
- The ball is thrown beyond a position of 15 metres (HKMRFU – 10 metres) from the touch line,
- The ball becomes unplayable,
- A ruck or maul is taking place and all the feet of players in the ruck or maul have moved beyond the line of touch.

Line-out Checklists:

Coach/Referee ensures that:

- The correct team throws in the ball,
- The gap between the teams is correct (use the player at the front of each line to assist you with this),
- All players not in the line-out are back on the 10 metre line (U11/U12 HKMRFU – 7 metres, U9/U10 5 metres), Note: U9 line out is non-contested therefore there is no option of varying lineout numbers, U10/U11/U12 lineout is contested therefore varying lineout numbers is an option.
- The player throwing in is on the line-of-touch – no deviation to one side to advantage that player's team,
- The defending hooker does not interfere with the player throwing the ball in,
- The ball is not thrown until you are satisfied with the formation of the lineout.

Coach/Referee should watch for:

- No lifting,
- Players jumping early across the line-of-touch – offside,
- Ball is thrown in 3 metres,
- Last feet of a ruck or maul crossing the line-of-touch before the backs advance across the 10 metre line (U11/U12 HKMRFU – 7 metres, U9/U10 5 metres),
- Forwards in the line-out joining an ensuing ruck or maul from the back,
- Forwards from the lineout not joining the ruck or maul not placing themselves in an offside position.

Please Note: Know when a lineout ends and when players not in the lineout can advance.

HKMRFU Summary Checklist – Lineout!

- 1) **Where is the ball?**
- 2) **Mark the touch line indicating the line of touch,**
- 3) **HOLD the thrower,**
- 4) **Make a mark on the 3 metre line,**
- 5) **Set the 1 metre gap by placing the first player from each side,**
- 6) **Check for straight lines,**
- 7) **Where is the throwers opposite number located,**
- 8) **Check numbers in the line-out,**
- 9) **Check 7 metre offside lines,**
- 10) **Check your position, select on of the four pillars.**

- 3) **Tackle:** The tackle and post tackle situation are the areas where the iRB elite referees score the lowest points on the iRB assessment scheme. The tackle has been an area where top referees have not always set a good example for coach/referees or young upcoming referees.

Also, tackle situations happen frequently in a rugby match – in top games there can be more than 200 tackles. But even at lower playing levels, the tackle is the most frequent situation in any game of rugby and it remains, by its nature, a safety issue.

Clearly, the problems for the coach/referee are created by the dynamism of this particular aspect of the game and from the difficulty in identifying those players who are transgressing the law and stopping the continuity of the game.

Objective of a tackle: For the defending team, the objective of a tackle is to break the continuity of possession of the attacking team.

For the Coach/Referee, the objective is to ensure the continuity of the game and allow 'quick ball' for either team. Together with the ruck situation, this area, this area is a key phase of the modern game of rugby with the majority of penalties arising from the players not conforming to the law.

The tackle requires a minimum of two players – one from each team and one of them must be the ball carrier. The ball carrier is held and brought to ground (at least with one knee). All players involved must then conform to the requirements stated in the laws of the game.

Player obligations and the refereeing process: Obligations for players in the tackle situation rest with three different roles:

- The tackler,
- The tackled player – ball carrier,
- The arriving players.

Tackle Management: As a coach/referee you must learn the definitions of the tackle from the law book, and it is a good idea to practice tackle management by watching videos of your own games or other games of the same standard you regularly referee. It is good practice to call out the phases and preventive calls as in a regular game:

- 1st. *What the tackler does?* **Encourage the tackler to move away!** The tackler is obliged in law to move away having made the tackle, as doing so allows the tackled player to move the ball away. You can use your voice to encourage this movement, but if that does not work the tackler will have to be penalized. Players in this position often slow the game down by not moving away quickly enough. If a tackling player gets trapped through no fault of his/her own, you should blow your whistle and order a scrum with the side moving forward throwing in, or the attacking side if neither team was moving forward.
- 2nd. *What the tackled player does?* **Encourage the tackled player to get the ball away!** If this is done it makes the situation on the ground so much easier to manage, as the ball is back in play and fewer players can interfere around the tackle area. If the player is tackled without any teams in support and tries to slow things down by holding on to the ball, the contest for possession is being stopped and this should be penalized. Use your voice to encourage players to comply with the law.
- 3rd. *What the arriving player does?* **Be prepared to blow early if arriving bodies go to ground and kill the ball!** Players arriving after a tackle must stay on their feet. If they go to ground, they must be penalized. The effect of this point of law is:
 - (a) To stop the tackled player and his/her team from retaining the ball
 - (b) To prevent the tackling team from contesting the ball.

When the players fall over, you have to judge what effect (materiality) their actions or inability to stay on their feet has had in relation to (a) and (b) above.

If you end up with bodies all over the ground, the ball will not emerge and this can lead to the use of boots on players, which must be prevented. It is far better to blow quickly in this situation, especially if the ball is not going to emerge. It is sometimes difficult to adjudge who is at fault when there is a pile of bodies on the ground, and you can award a scrum with the throw in to the team going forward at the time of the stoppage or the team who are in their opponents half if neither team was going forward. However, it is your obligation to identify offenders in the first place.

Arriving players must play the ball by coming from their own goal line and from behind the player in the tackle closest to the player's goal line. They must enter the tackle 'through the gate'. You can use your voice to encourage this action.

Tackle checklist – Watch for:

- Player brought to ground/ball touches ground,
- Player held by opponent when brought to ground,
- Tackler releases tackled player immediately,
- Tackled player passes, places or releases the ball immediately,
- Both players move away and Endeavour to get to their feet before playing the ball again,
- Neither tackler not tackled player interferes with the ball on the ground,
- Players joining or the next players handling the ball are on their feet,
- Players joining the tackle come from behind that part of the body of a player from their own team, which is closest to their own goal line.

HKMRFU Summary Checklist – Tackle!

- 1) **Be there!**
- 2) **Your positioning? (A line or D line?)**
- 3) **Identify if it is a tackle or not?**
- 4) **Talk through – (i.e. 'release', 'roll away')**
- 5) **Tackler releases the ball carrier,**
- 6) **Ball carrier releases the ball,**
- 7) **Arriving players – (i.e. 'through the gate')**
- 8) **Arriving players on their feet!**

The RFU have put together the supporting video example for [tackler not moving away from the ball/player examples.](#)

- 4)&5) **Ruck and Maul:** As a coach/referee you will have to **understand the difference between rucks and mauls** and will have to be familiar with the objectives of rucks and mauls, their formation and the offside laws relating to them. You must know how to position yourself in that particular phase of the game.

The difference between rucks and mauls:

1. A **ruck** is formed when the ball is on the ground and one or more players from each team are on their feet and in physical contact, closing around the ball between them. Two players can form a ruck, one from each side.
2. A **maul** is formed by one or more players from each team on their feet and in physical contact closing around a player who is in possession of the ball. A maul requires two players from the ball carrying side and one member of the opposition.
3. Players involved in either a ruck or a maul must be bound to a member of their own side.

Objectives of the ruck: The purpose of a ruck is to recycle the ball after the ball carrier has come into contact with opposition players in open play and around set pieces. Together with the tackle situation, this area is a key phase of the modern game of rugby with the majority of penalties arising from players not conforming to this and the tackle law.

Objectives of the maul: The purpose of a maul is also to recycle the ball after ball carriers come into contact with opposition players in open play and around set pieces. However, a maul cannot be set up by a single player from one team, but occur when the ball carrier is bound to at least one team mate and is held by an opponent, on their feet in the field of play. Mauls very often form after lineout's, behind scrums and after kick-offs or 22M (HKMRFU 15M) kicks. It is essential for the referee to observe the ball carrier in order to make correct decisions about the end of the maul. There are also special safety issues involved with the maul, namely the possible collapsing of it.

Formation and refereeing process: Rucks and mauls are dynamic contact phases of the game and require the referee to manage these situations according to the speed of the game. You must be close to the action and in full knowledge of the underlying process in front of you. Only then can you guarantee a safe environment for the players and ensure the best possible management of the continuity of the game.

Ruck Checklist – Watch for:

- Ball on ground,
- Players on their feet,
- Players joining the ruck from behind the rear feet,
- Players coming in over the top,
- Correct binding on players, especially when holding the ball in the back row of the ruck,
- Rucking of the Player and not the ball,
- Hands in the ruck.

Maul Checklist – Watch for:

- Ball being in the possession of a player,
- The correct formation (ball carrier and one player from each team),
- The person or team responsible for taking the ball into the maul,
- The maul becoming stationary and not moving forward again within five seconds,
- The ball becoming grounded and the maul becoming a ruck,
- Players joining the maul from behind the rear feet.

HKMRFU Summary Checklist – Ruck!

- 1) **Be there!**
- 2) **Your positioning? (A line or D line?)**
- 3) **Identify if it is a ruck or not?**
- 4) **Talk through – (i.e. ‘ruck, hands off’, ‘in through the gates’)**
- 5) **Players joining - (i.e. behind rear feet, through the gates, hips above shoulders, on their feet)**
- 6) **Players/Ball on the ground - (i.e. ‘roll away’, ‘hands off ball’)**
- 7) **Offside lines!**

The English RFU has put together the supporting video example of the [offside at a ruck – team not in possession examples](#).

HKMRFU Summary Checklist – Maul!

- 1) **Be there!**
- 2) **Your positioning? (A line or D line?)**
- 3) **Identify if it is a maul or not?**
- 4) **Talk through – (i.e. ‘maul’, ‘use it or lose it’)**
- 5) **Players joining – (i.e. behind rear feet, hips above shoulders, binding)**
- 6) **Players pulling/collapsing the maul**
- 7) **Offside lines!**

So there you have it! Five summary checklists that if used on a consistent basis, will produce consistent refereeing across Hong Kong Mini Rugby. As I have said in previous newsletters, refereeing is not for everyone, so if you honestly don't want to referee then don't do it! It is our aim moving forward to encourage all clubs in each age grouping to commit to developing a number of dedicated coach/referees to match officiate. I'm currently working on

conducting informal referee sessions where we can come together and gain a common understanding to the role of the coach/referee.
In the meantime please do know your iRB laws and Age Grouping Law Variations, which shape the player pathway development.

Until next time, have fun!

Yours Sincerely,

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HKMRFU – Coaching and Refereeing Co-ordinator.