



Hong Kong Mini Rugby Football Union

香港小型欖球總會

## Mini Rugby Refereeing – September 2011



**Peter Hudson – HKMRFU Coaching and Refereeing Coordinator**

Dear Coaches/Referees,

Welcome to the first of what I hope are regular 'Mini Rugby Refereeing Newsletters'. As the new HKMRFU Refereeing Coordinator I would like to begin by saying that the goal moving forward is to have a **consistent standard** of refereeing across Hong Kong Mini Rugby! Refereeing is not for everyone, and I can attest that referees are human, players are human, coaches are human, and humans make ERRORS! Coming from an aviation background where human error can be catastrophic and deadly, there are similar philosophies and concepts that can be used to ensure that the potential for human error is reduced and consistently high performance achieved! If I can quote from iRB supreme referee Paddy O'Brien, in a recent pre Rugby World Cup interview, "the consistency of refereeing performance at the RWC will come from a solid understanding of the principle of quick ball. The "Big Five" will be the encasing philosophy that will support this principle. Some teams will want to play expansive rugby, and others will not, that's their choice, but we want the space available to the team winning possession of the ball. This is the philosophy agreed on by coaches, so that's what the referees have to deliver." The "Big Five" main areas that the iRB want us to focus on at **ALL** levels of rugby will be discussed in this newsletter. Through out the newsletter there will be web links to video examples of each area under discussion. So please make sure you have an Internet connection while reviewing this material.

The laws of rugby exist to allow the game to flow and function properly. However, this can lead to concerns over the interpretation of these laws. The iRB is currently concentrating on five key areas that they want referees to focus on to improve the quality of the game. These five key areas are as follows:

- 1 - **Illegal obstruction at the maul.**
- 2 - **Offside from kicks.**
- 3 - **Slowing down the scrum call.**
- 4 - **Offside at the fringes.**
- 5 - **Tackler rolling away.**

The following refereeing directives have been issued by the iRB and are to be implemented at **ALL** levels of the game. Their aim is to ensure that there is an equal contest for possession and to allow the game to flow more freely. To assist referees, coaches, players and observers to understand how these law clarifications affect the game, the English RFU has put together the below resource of explanations and supporting video examples. This resource highlights key infringement areas to help develop a common understanding of the philosophy for the 2011/12 season. It is these five philosophies that underpin the working knowledge of the referee to officiate the principle of quick ball and space.

### 1 - **Illegal obstruction at the maul.**

Law 10.1 (c) Illegal obstruction at the maul in the lineout and from restarts.

**Maul:** From our observations of games across the globe, the lineout maul has been poorly refereed. The ELVs (Experimental Law Variations) originally allowed the maul to be brought down. That ruling was not adopted, but there still needs to be a fair contest at the maul. Especially from lineout's, teams have formed barriers in front of the ball carrier before the maul is formed. It creates an obstruction. Your team now needs to make sure it engages with the opposition before allowing the ball to be moved back in the maul.

**Restarts:** Players from the team in possession must not obstruct opponents closing in on the ball carrier. Referees should penalise clear and obvious offences

The English RFU has put together the supporting video examples of [illegal maul formation from a line out](#).

### 2 - **Offside from kicks.**

Law 11.1(a) Offside from kicks. There will be more kicking because of the 22M, (HKMRFU 15M – U12s) pass back law. It has been noticed that sides have been poor at putting themselves onside from a kick. The non-kicker has to wait to be put onside, moving away from the intended receiver if he is within 10M (HKMRFU 7M – U12). Crucially, teams that are "lazy" give the receiver less time. This penalises the receiving team, giving the kicking team more reward. Even two metres of extra space allow more options for the receiver.

The English RFU has put together the supporting video example of [offside from kick](#).

### 3 - **Slowing down the scrum call.**

Law 20.1 (g) Slowing down the scrum call or 'Scrum Engagement Sequence'. We have requested that referees do not let players dictate the scrum engagement cadence. They have to trust the referee's call. We want to slow the engagement process down to reduce the number of scrum resets. At the moment there is a lot of talk about scrum resets, but it is a phenomenon mostly found at the top level. Yes, the referee has a strong role to play. The problem lies also with the players. They are trying their very best to outdo the opposition, by foul means or fair. With all that movement, inevitably

scrums will collapse. If you go down a few levels, you will not find the same amount of resets. It boils down to player buy-in. Why should the referee have to battle with the front rows to gain a steady scrum?

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

#### **4 - Offside at the fringes.**

Law 16.5 (d) Offside at the fringes. Players not getting behind the back feet at the ruck chokes the game. This is still an area that is poorly refereed and so we are asking referees, along with their assistant referees (if available) to look out for this infringement. Even half a metre offside reduces the attacking team's options. Players should be penalised for breaching the offside line – particularly defending players – as this restricts the attacking options. Specific attention should be paid to players close to the ruck, and players in the wider spaces.

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

#### **5 - Tackler rolling away.**

Law 15.4 (b) Tackler rolling away. We are asking referees to strictly apply the law at the tackle. The tackler who has fallen with the tackled player must release the tackled player before he gets up to compete for the ball. Previously players were getting away with holding onto the tackled player as they regained their feet (David Pocock and Richie Mccaw?). Observations from the Super Rugby demonstrate this has created quicker ball at the breakdown. It is important to note that a tackled player must be released by anyone involved in the tackle. So even if the tackler remains on their feet, they must release the tackled player before they can play the ball.

I think we have come full circle in terms of communication between the referees and players. The constant chat from the referee has become too big a feature. We now like the idea of "less is best". Players should not rely on the referees to tell them what to do. One command should be enough. A player should know when he is offside or off his feet. There should be less talk from the players as a consequence. Referees, as a matter of course, speak to the teams before the game, and specifically the front rows. I would suggest this is a good time to discuss these five areas in which you will be focusing your attention.

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

To summarize the discussion on error management and consistent refereeing performance, your baseline is formed from a solid knowledge of law and law variation summaries relating to player pathway development, solid understanding of the principles of the game, and the encasing philosophies that provide the working knowledge of those principles. This newsletter has discussed five of those encasing philosophies currently being highlighted by the iRB. For a Referee the working knowledge comes from having a checklist approach to various aspects of the game. In upcoming newsletters I will be discussing mental checklists that can be used to manage the other "Big Five – Scrum, Lineout, Tackle, Ruck, Maul."

In the meantime, now is an appropriate time to review and refresh your law knowledge. The best online source for rugby law knowledge is the iRB's [www.irblaws.com](http://www.irblaws.com). I recommend that at the beginning of every season, you log on and complete the course and test. For those of use that have iphones, the iRB laws of the game app, is now available from the App Store.

Also coming up in the next newsletter will be some discussion on how we want the 3M offside law applied by the coach/referees in U6s – U8s.

Until next time, have fun!

Yours Sincerely,

Peter Hudson  
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