



Shape of the Game 2024

Law Application Guideline: Reinforcement of current law March 2024

At the Shape of the Game meeting at the end of February 2024, many areas of the game were discussed, looking at existing laws and also possible future law changes. This Law Application Guideline outlines the areas of current law which all stakeholders agreed needed to be reinforced to players, coaches and match officials. In addition to this guideline, further work on the laws of the game will be undertaken.

We urge players and coaches to adapt quickly, so we will see more ball in flow, and fewer stoppages, which are the principles behind these particular areas. We acknowledge that as coaches and players re-adjust in these areas, this may lead to more penalties and therefore more stoppages which is contrary to the intention of the guideline. Hopefully, any increase will be short-lived.

Caterpillar Rucks

There is universal support for an increased focus on this area. In speeding up play away from a tackle/ruck, there are a number of existing laws which we remind all stakeholders about:

Ending a ruck

15.17 When the ball has been clearly won by a team at the ruck, and is available to be played, the referee calls “use it”, after which the ball must be played away from the ruck within five seconds.

Sanction: Scrum

Definitions:

Played: The ball is played when it is intentionally touched by a player.

Fans, spectators, players and coaches all want to see the ball in flow more than is sometimes the case at present. Players will be asked to speed up playing the ball after it is clearly won and available in a ruck. This will limit the time available for more players to join a ruck in the way we see at the moment

If a foot can be used to bring the ball towards the back of a ruck, the definition of “played” has been met.

Subsequently, match officials are asked to call “Use it” sooner than we are currently seeing. Further to that, the five seconds referenced in Law 15.17 is to be adhered to. If the ball does not leave the ruck after five seconds, a scrum should be awarded to the opposing team.

World Rugby and its stakeholders will also consider future law amendments in this area as well as this reinforcement.

Video examples: <https://vimeo.com/922949465/>

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Scrum – Brake foot

In February 2022, following representations from player organisations, the introduction of the brake foot was announced as a Global Law Trial. This set out to manage axial loading (pressure on heads and necks) during the scrum engagement sequence. To do this, during the “Crouch” and “Bind” phases of the engagement sequence, hookers are now mandated to have a stabilising foot in middle of the tunnel. It can be withdrawn on the “Set” call.

Law definition: Brake foot

Where a hooker has one foot positioned forward in the middle of the tunnel to help stability and to avoid axial loading. This position is adopted throughout the “Crouch” and “Bind” elements of the engagement sequence. The foot can only be withdrawn after the “Set” and before the strike for the ball.

In line with the definition, during the “Crouch” and “Bind” phase, match officials must be able to see both hookers’ brake foot in the middle of the tunnel. This is referred to as a full brake foot and is mandatory for both teams.

This should ensure stability and avoid axial loading. It is permissible to adjust the position of the brake foot, but it must still be fulfilling the act of a full brake before being fully withdrawn on the “Set” call. The hooker from the throwing in team must strike for the ball (as per Law 19.22.)

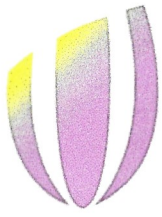
If any adjustment by the hooker creates instability, pre-engagement or axial loading, then the brake is not acting as law intends and would be liable to sanction.

Water carriers

In July 2022, a Global Law Trial was introduced for the elite game, limiting the number of times water carriers could enter the field of play to two moments in each half. After initial feedback, this was amended in January 2023, with water carriers being able to enter the field of play following tries.

Law 6.29 The following may enter the playing area provided they do not interfere with play:

- a. Two nominated water carriers during a stoppage in play...
 - i. In matches with a squad size of 23, water carriers may only enter when a try is scored – the scoring side to an area on/near the 10m line in their own half. The non-scoring side can take water into in-goal or retrieve from behind the dead-ball line. The water carriers must leave when the conversion is taken.
 - ii. At a penalty try, no water carriers may enter the field.
 - iii. Only when no tries are scored should a natural stoppage, in a neutral place on the pitch, be used to allow players to receive water.



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Where this coincides with an injury, water-carriers must leave the pitch as the medic leaves the pitch.

Medics are covered by Law 6.28 which states

6.28 Appropriately trained and accredited first-aid or immediate (pitch-side) care persons may enter the playing area to attend to injured players at any time it is safe to do so.

b. These medics can only carry and provide water to a player that they are treating

While initial adherence to these trials was positive, we are now seeing an increase in water carriers coming on to the field at any, and every injury break, therefore increasing any stoppage length until they all leave the field.

The Global Law Trial wording is clear that water carriers should only come on after the scoring of a try. Water can be available at all times in technical areas or behind dead ball lines. Only when no tries are scored in the first 15-20 minutes of a game, should a natural stoppage be used for water carriers to come on.

There may be times where play is stopped for a lengthy injury treatment, especially where an injured player is being removed from the field. In that scenario, water carriers may enter the field during that stoppage.

These are all existing laws which we are asking to be adhered to more strictly in order to keep the game in flow, and reduce unnecessary stoppages in the game.

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