FOREWORD

Sevens rugby continues to grow in the United States. Men, women, boys and girls are being introduced to Sevens in increasing numbers thanks to the inclusion of Sevens rugby into the Olympic Games. There is no time left to prepare for the coming wave of participation in Sevens—it is already here.

Like all sports, Sevens is continually evolving to meet the challenges of competitive play, each side seeking an advantage or a set of tactics and strategy that leads to victory. Match officials at all levels need to assume responsibility to keep up with these changes. The goal of the 2013 Refereeing Sevens Handbook is to assist referees, players and coaches to keep pace with these changes and provide constructive direction.

We must always be aware that there are limits to what the Handbook can provide. There can be no substitute for a steady diet of increasingly competitive Sevens matches, followed by hands-on coaching.

Patrick McNally
National Sevens Referee Program Manager
2013
SEVENS RUGBY CONTINUES TO GROW

Broadcast Coverage

The iRB has announced more strong broadcast figures for the Olympic sport of Rugby Sevens and the HSBC Sevens World Series 2012/13.

The broadcast report published by the iRB’s television distribution partner Pro-Active Television on the recently concluded 2012/13 HSBC Sevens World Series confirms another record global audience, with a 5% overall increase on the strong figures of 2011/12.

The grand prix-style, nine-round World Series accumulated a record 4,504 hours of total airtime across 149 territories.

In all, 38 broadcasters aired coverage to an estimated 390 million homes either via live, delayed live, repeats or the official 30-minute ‘iRB Sevens World’ show.

Only eight years ago, the total airtime for the World Series stood at just 300 hours, underlining the considerable advance Rugby Sevens has made in the eyes of international broadcasters and the global sporting public.

IRB Chairman, Bernard Lapasset said: “The HSBC Sevens World Series has now firmly established itself in the sporting calendar among international broadcasters and also fans around the world, who generated a record 562,486 overall attendance across the nine rounds.”

“As an Olympic sport Sevens is now well on the road to Rio, attracting new athletes to Rugby all the time from a variety of different backgrounds, and also new fans with its winning blend of skill, speed, competitive action and festival atmosphere.”

Rugby World Cup Sevens 2013

The International Rugby Board has confirmed that Rugby World Cup Sevens 2013... [was] broadcast to more territories than any previous Rugby World Cup Sevens event.

The flagship tournament, which brings together the world’s top Sevens players across 24 men’s and 16 women’s teams representing 28 nations [was] broadcast to 321 million homes (more than double 2009) in 152 territories (up 11 on 2009) through 29 international broadcasters in 19 languages.

The figures, released by the IRB’s broadcast managers ProActive Television, show that total coverage of the world’s premier men’s and women’s Sevens tournament has increased exponentially. The previous record was set at [the RWC 7s in] Dubai 2009, an event that played a major role in delivering Rugby Sevens to the 2016 and 2020 Olympic Games programme.

The Rugby Sevens success story is underpinned by the HSBC Sevens World Series, the popular grand prix style championship comprising nine international events and the IRB Women’s Sevens World Series, which enjoyed a successful debut in 2012/13 with events in Dubai, USA, China and the Netherlands.
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Objectives of the USARUGBY Sevens Refereeing Program

1. **Standardize** and institute IRB-approved Sevens refereeing practices across the United States.

2. **Identify**, train and manage Referees based on Sevens rugby and target those individuals with potential for future development.

3. **Contact** and work with the Sevens coaching community.

4. **Manage** the National Club Sevens Championship, the National All-Star Championship and the National Collegiate Sevens Championship, and attend as many Territorial Sevens Championships as possible.

5. **Work** with the Men’s and Women’s National Sevens Team programs.

Principles Of The Game

**Spirit**—“Rugby owes much of its appeal to the fact that it is played both to the letter and within the spirit of the laws. The responsibility for ensuring that this happens lies not with one individual – it involves coaches, captains, players and referees.”

—From IRB Playing Charter

**Contest and Continuity**—“... as one team attempts to maintain continuity of possession, the opposing team strives to contest for possession. This provides the essential balance between continuity of play and continuity of possession. This balance of contestability and continuity applies to both set piece and general play.”

—From IRB Playing Charter

We Must Ensure A Fair Contest For The Ball
A. **Differences in MIND SET:**
   - Possession is paramount.
   - Tournament play as opposed to a single match.
   - Certain teams choose to avoid contact.
   - There are more quick penalty taps.
   - When the ball goes into touch, it is likely there will be more quick throw ins.

B. **Differences in ADAPTATIONS OF THE LAW:**
   - Seven players.
   - Times:
     - Two seven-minute halves with a one-minute halftime.
     - Ten-minute halves for Cup finals.
     - Two minutes: sin bin.
     - Forty seconds: conversions kicks.
     - Thirty seconds: penalty kicks.
   - Conversions and penalty kicks are drop kicks only.
   - Kick-offs/restarts are made by team that scored.
     - Every infraction is a free kick.
   - Scrums consist of three players on each side.
   - Five substitutes allowed.
   - In-goal judges were introduced in 1996 to speed up the game.

C. **Differences in ATHLETES:**
   - Speed...Speed...and more Speed. No room for wide bodies.
   - Every Sevens player is essentially playing the same position.

D. **Differences in SKILL SETS:**
   - Mobility.
   - More one-on-one tackling.
   - A real contest for the ball at restarts, like set pieces.
   - Drop kicks.
REFEREERING SEVEN-A-SIDE RUGBY

The goal of every Sevens Referee should be to keep the ball in play as long as legally possible.

This does NOT mean ignoring infractions, but puts the responsibility on the Referees to make sure that they elevate the standard of play.

- Set clear, consistent standards early in the match/tournament.
- Communicate precisely what they see.
- Work with the players to prevent penalties.
- Facilitate quick play (ensure proper quick penalty taps, quick throw ins).

Speed, pace and quickness. Use all of your experience and ability to allow the players to play the game of Sevens at speed, with pace, and as quickly as their skills allow. Do not allow the players’ actions—or yours—to slow down the game.

The Referee can feel—and indeed is—very exposed on the rugby pitch in a game of Sevens. Given that fact and the nature of the shorter and faster game, it is imperative that the Referee be sharp mentally and physically, as well as accurate in decision-making. The Referee must get it right, and must get it right the first time.

Sevens Referees need to remain calm, especially if situations get heated, and accurately handle any form of explosion. The tension of the concentrated period, and the more obvious one-on-one confrontations, combines with the heightened emotions found in a tournament—where the winner stands to gain more and the team on the brink of being eliminated may play with more reckless abandon.

One decision can and will affect the outcome of a Sevens game.

—Steve Lander, retired International Referee
The first priority for the Sevens Referee is to get the tackler away from the ball carrier.

A tackle occurs when the ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and is brought to ground.

—Law 15, iRB Laws of the Game

The three most important phases of Sevens rugby are the tackle, the tackle, and the tackle. Other phases of play have importance too, but the quality of Sevens matches will largely depend on how accurately and how consistently the Referee sorts out the breakdown. It is a dynamic, high-speed contest for possession that Referees need to get right.

**TACKLER**

First and foremost, the tackler MUST release the ball carrier and allow them a chance to play the ball. The tackler can then get back to his/her feet and contest for possession before a ruck or maul is formed. However, there needs to be a clear and obvious physical separation between the tackler and the ball carrier, before they can recover and legally contest for possession. Getting the tackler away from the ball carrier is the first thing a Referee should ALWAYS work on at the tackle.

**BALL CARRIER**

Ball carriers also have responsibilities. Once the tackler has clearly released, the ball carrier must play the ball or move away from the ball. Arriving players (non-tacklers) coming through the gate on their feet, do not have to wait and can contest for possession immediately. Referees need to use their management skills at the onset of the tackle to let the ball carrier know they must play the ball NOW.

**ARRIVING PLAYER**

It is vital that once Referees have sorted out the ball carrier/tackler sequence that all arriving players come through the gate (backside facing their own dead ball line) and stay on their feet. This requires Referees to first focus on the ball in the tackle and then step back and observe the arriving players as they approach the tackle area. Referees need to track arriving players and verify that each one is entering from his/her side of the tackle, through the gate. Referees must also be vigilant about players leaving their feet at the breakdown and sealing off the ball. Let all the players know there is a standard that will be kept.

**TACKLER ASSIST**

A player who executes a tackle by bringing the ball carrier to ground and holding them, but remains on his/her feet is considered a tackler assist - not a tackler. This action creates a situation where there is a tackle (ball carrier has been brought to ground and is being held), with no tackler (the player on his feet is not a tackler). Furthermore, this non-tackler has two obligations: (1) he/she must release the ball carrier and allow the ball carrier to play the ball (like a tackler), and (2) he/she can only contest for possession by coming through the gate (like a non-tackler).
**SEALING OFF**

To make sure there is a fair contest for the ball, keep players arriving at the tackle on their feet. Allowing players (both attacking and defending) to leave their feet and seal the ball off is a recipe for disaster—lots of slow ball and frustration. Players need to enter the breakdown with their shoulders above their hips, heads up and stay on their feet and be able to support their own weight.

**Arrival.** It is vital to use efficient running lines to get to the breakdown as soon as possible. Strive to be the third person to the breakdown. Job One is to find and see the ball. The quicker and better positioned you are at the tackle, the more effective you are as a Referee.

**Availability.** The ball should be made available immediately; if it does not come out quickly then something is wrong. Sort out who is slowing down the ball and deal with them quickly and accurately.

**Defending.** Defenders delay the release of the ball to allow more time for them to get into their defensive alignment and to slow down the speed of attack.

**Attacking.** Ball carriers get isolated and will stall until support arrives. When ball carriers go to ground, they give away any rights to play the ball and must release the ball to arriving players on their feet.

**GET IN, THEN GET OUT**

Referees need to get to the breakdown quickly (GET IN), see the ball and referee what is in front of them. After the ball is then won or secured, move away from the breakdown (GET OUT) to open up your range of vision and your perspective, so it is easier to pick up any illegal gate entry or offsides at the ruck.
WATCH FOR:

Through the Gate. Be vigilant for players entering the tackle from the side. Do not let the defense run back through the tackle area as it impedes or slows down play (obstruction).

On their Feet. Insist that all arriving players to the tackle area to contest possession stay on their feet.

Communication. Always use clear verbal communication to identify whether each breakdown is a tackle or a ruck.

Off-side Lines. Be careful not to create phantom off-side lines. When there is no ruck, there is no off-side.

Direction of Play. If there is a tackle, but not a ruck or a maul, players are free to move in any direction on the pitch (i.e., fill in opponents passing lanes, move behind the ball) outside of the tackle area.

Late and Dangerous Tackles. They are more likely to occur with sudden changes of direction and more open field tackling typical in Sevens rugby.

Isolated Tackled Players Holding on to the Ball. A ball carrier isolated from teammates and not releasing the ball must be penalized. From a long body ruck, or squeezeball, the ball must come out immediately (the sun can shine on the ball and be contested).

Third Player Diving on Top. As a tackler rolls away, a third player dives over the player. It may look accidental, but this slows down the ball and it must be penalized. Players must stay on their feet.

Turning of a Tackle Player. Tacklers must make an effort to release tackled ball carriers and/or the ball. Tackled ball carriers must be able to play the ball behind them and back towards their own team.

No Tackle. Has there even been a tackle?

QUICK DECISION

As a Sevens Referee, you must approach the breakdown as soon as possible and locate the ball quickly. Analyze and resolve the situation immediately by either letting play continue, penalizing offenders promptly, or declaring the ball unplayable (scrum up). You can only spend two to three seconds on these decisions, which are your only options.

Prevention and correct reading of the advantage options are essential and often resolve the breakdown situation immediately. You should not allow long disputes over the ball at the breakdown as they nearly always end in penalty kicks (nobody wins).
As a Referee, you need to clearly understand what constitutes a ruck.

A ruck occurs when . . . “one or more players from each team, who are on their feet and in physical contact, close around the ball on the ground. Open play has ended.”

A maul occurs when a ball carrier . . . “is held by one or more opponents, and one or more of the ball carrier’s team mates bind on the ball carrier.”

ENTRY
Players joining a ruck or maul must do so from behind the foot of their hindmost team-mate in the ruck or maul. A player may join alongside this hindmost player. [Laws 16.5 (c) and 17.4 (c)]

PLAYERS OFF THEIR FEET
In promoting a fair contest for the ball at the breakdown, Referees will act against players who seal off the ball by going to the ground over—or on—the ball carrier. Occasionally players who are legitimately on the ground (by clearing out an opposing player and then going to ground), then infringe by remaining in that position and not making an attempt to roll away.

OFF-SIDE LINES PART II
State plainly when a ruck is occurring because off-side lines then come into play. Use clear verbal communication to inform both teams and avoid confusion. When a ruck has formed, an off-side line is established at the hindmost foot on each team’s side of the ruck. Referees need to monitor this “no man’s land”, between the two hindmost feet from both teams, so important space is preserved for teams to attack and defend. Don’t allow players to loiter in this no man’s land and be destructive by taking away legal space.

PUSHING VERSUS PULLING IN A RUCK
Players may contest possession at a ruck by driving and pushing opponents back while remaining on their feet, or by grabbing opponents and rolling them to the side. However, pulling players out of a ruck causes it to collapse, and “a player must not intentionally collapse a ruck, this is dangerous play”. [Law 16.3 (c)]
MAULS CAN—AND DO—OCCUR IN SEVENS. Primarily defensive ploys in Sevens, mauls are usually formed in an attempt to tie up the ball and force a turnover by scrum. If a maul has formed, announce “MAUL” clearly to let everyone know possession is at stake.

Teams that are making forward progress in the maul can maintain possession. Referees should clearly warn players to “use it or lose it” if the maul remains stationary or has stopped moving forward for more than five seconds.

If the attacking team decides to take the ball to ground by ending the maul and recycling the ball, the ball should be available immediately. If the ball does not make it to the ground (part of the definition of a ruck) in a timely manner, a non-productive maul has occurred and a turnover scrum should be awarded.

“When the ball in a maul becomes unplayable, the Referee does not allow prolonged wrestling for it. A scrum is ordered”. [Law 17.6 (f)]

Be aware that defensive teams can still be guilty of pulling down the maul when it does not go the way they want. Clear, concise communication is key here to minimize player frustration.

CHARGING. Strictly police the actions of players who enter the breakdown and fail to bind onto a player when they clean out. Charging into an opponent at the breakdown with the use of the shoulder and making no attempt to wrap their arms is to be treated as dangerous play.

THERE ARE FAR MORE TACKLES in Sevens than in Fifteens, and far more tackles than rucks.
Possession is vital in Sevens and the set scrum is one of three first phase situations in which possession of the ball is contested. Only the kick-off occurs with more frequency.

With just three players to a side, Sevens scrums can prove more difficult to manage than Fifteens. Most Sevens forwards are not traditional (Fifteens) front row players, and it is somewhat unnatural for them to play in the scrum.

**Manage scrums correctly** for poorly managed ones will destroy the game. Be demanding and precise at the pre-engagement every time; early and consistent standards will pay dividends. The object for the Referee is to get the ball back in play quickly, yet you must find the balance between a fair contest for the ball and keeping the ball in play. If the team putting the ball in the scrum gets clean ball—play on. Follow up with the forwards at the next scrum to straighten out any technical deficiencies. This is not an excuse to allow teams to spoil ball or engage in dangerous play; however, keep in mind that multiple scrum restarts eat up valuable game time.

The hooker must independently bind to each of the props. The props must bind onto their opposite numbers. The hooker may legally overbind or underbind (or a combination of both).

**Establish a stable scrum** before the ball is put in. If a scrum is unstable, it might be prudent to position yourself on the opposite side of the put in and observe the defensive loose-head prop. Make sure that all players drive straight and stay committed to the scrum until it is over. Do not allow forwards to turn in or pop up in the scrum, spoiling possession.

**Use a full scrum count**, but do not draw the scrum cadence out. Sevens scrums are not as dangerous as they can be in Fifteens, so the key is getting the ball back into play as soon as possible. Ensure that the scrum cadence is always the same: “CROUCH—BIND—SET” (and given without delay). Make sure that all four props have a proper bind on their opposite numbers (up high on the back or side), before calling “SET”. Remember, teams may put the ball into the scrum from either side.

**Promote a fair contest for the ball** with a straight put in from the scrum half. Manage this aspect of the game prior to engagement. Make sure the scrum half is square to the scrum and lined up with the tunnel. Verbally remind scrum halves of their responsibility for straight put ins. Have them stand back from the scrum before put in, etc.

**Off-side for non-participants.** At the scrum, both back lines (all non-participants in the scrum) must be back five meters from their team’s hindmost foot in the scrum.

**Off-side for scrum half.** Both scrum halves must take up a position on the same side of the scrum as the ball is put in. The scrum half not putting in the ball, may choose to start on the opposite side of the put in, but must be positioned 5 meters behind the hindmost foot on their side of the scrum, like other non-participants in the scrum.
After the ball has been won in the scrum, the scrum half whose team has not won the ball can do one of two things:

1. Follow the ball back through the scrum while remaining on-side (with both feet behind the ball).
2. Retreat to the hindmost foot on his/her side of the scrum and take up a position anywhere behind this off-side line.

Concentrate to see when the ball is out. This means keeping scrum halves not winning the ball on-side, but allowing them to contest for possession when the ball is out. This phase of play happens more quickly and in a more concentrated space than in Fifteens. Do not allow the defending scrum half to fall or dive on the ball as it emerges. This is a penalty offense.

Be proactive. Use preventative measures (communication) to manage the scrum. Uphold our standards for a fair contest for possession. Only penalize after the failure of all reasonable attempts to manage the scrum.

WATCH OUT FOR

Incorrect Binding – Props must bind on the hooker and on the upper body of the opposite prop. Not binding or binding on the shorts of the opposite prop creates instability.

Breaking Binding Early – Players will often attempt to leave the scrum prematurely to make an early tackle (and limit attacking space). You must not allow hookers to leave the scrum early (with the defending team most likely to offend). It is a penalty offense, which you can help prevent by ensuring correct binding.

Players Holding On – Watch for any players being held in the scrum after the ball has cleared. The ball-winning front row is more likely to hold onto the opposition in order to give their attack more space.

Pushing Early – Driving in the scrum before the ball is put in.

Pushing Up – Watch for popping up and/or boring in, especially by the loose-head prop of the team not putting in the ball. This is dangerous play and must be dealt with strictly.

Dropping the Scrum – Watch the body angles of the players before they engage in the scrum. Encourage props to drive straight and stay committed to the scrum.

Pulling Around – It is not always easy to detect the swinging/wheeling of the scrum. This needs careful monitoring to prevent such things as pulling the scrum about. Watch for forwards on their heels and/or their arms pulled back. If a scrum turns quickly, it is usually deliberate. It is not something the attacking team would want, as they would lose any advantage.

Kicking Through – This occurs when a forward (usually the hooker) kicks the ball through the scrum to spoil possession, often behind the opponent’s line. This is much easier to do in Sevens and is always a penalty offense.
Kick-Off/Restart Kicks

On average, there are six restarts in a Sevens match—which makes restarts the most frequent set piece in Sevens.

Kick-Offs And Restarts are all drop kicks. The team that scores—including a penalty kick or drop goal—must kick-off.

Ensure that all the players are behind the ball right from the first kick-off. Preventative management (talk) and enlisting the help of kickers can minimize the need for penalties.

Start on line with the kicking team. (Starting ten meters deep usually reveals a Referee’s laziness or lack of fitness.) The better positioned you are, the more effective you are as a Referee. The restart must be drop kicked from the center of the half way line (manage).

Be prepared for changes in the direction of the kick—a chip kick over a defense playing up too tight or a short grub kick if the opposition leaves gaps. Do not be in the way.

Penalize Infractions With A Free Kick

Examples:

- Kick-off goes less than ten meters and is not first played by the receiving team.
- Ball goes directly into touch.
- Kicking-team players are off-side at the kick-off.
- Ball goes into the in-goal and is downed immediately.
- Ball goes touch-in-goal or over the dead ball line.

Be patient at the kick-off. It may be tempting to blow the whistle quickly when it appears the ball will not travel ten meters but do not rush it; allow the kick-off to fully play out.

Ensure kicking-team players are on-side and not tackling players whose feet are off the ground (playing the man not the ball). Receiving-team players should not stand in front of a receiver and obstruct opponents from contesting for the ball.

Long vs Short Kick-Offs: Short kick-offs contest possession or put the receiving team under intense pressure at the point of reception. Long kick-offs may put receivers under pressure deep in their own territory before they can cross the twenty-two-meter line.

There is no set piece in Sevens that is more underrated than the kick-off.

—Emil Signes, former U.S. Sevens coach
Lines are used to restart play quickly after the ball has gone into touch.

Insist on setting the gap in every lineout (one meter wide). This will improve the chances for a fair contest for the ball and reduce opportunities for mischief. Free kick any player that insists on closing the gap before the ball is thrown in.

The team throwing in the ball determines the maximum number of players in the lineout (only count those players on the line-of-touch when the ball is to be thrown in). If a team chooses to have a receiver (a player in position to catch the ball when line-out players pass or tap the ball back from the lineout), that player needs to be a full two meters back from the lineout. Teams may also opt not to have a receiver.

Once the team throwing in the ball has established their number of jumpers in the lineout, no one on their team may leave or join the lineout, including the receiver. However, the team not throwing in the ball may be given a reasonable time to match—but not exceed—that number for their jumpers. The receiver may join the lineout after the lineout has started (when the ball has left the thrower's hands). This also applies to the thrower and the player marking the thrower.

The non-throwing team must match the thrower in the lineout. This "non-thrower" must be two meters from the line-of-touch and two meters from the five-meter line ("2 and 2"). This will prevent teams from dropping their non-thrower back to provide better defensive coverage in the back line.

Be prepared for many quick throw ins. A quick throw in may be thrown in straight or towards the throwing team's own goal line. This is important because it allows teams a chance to counterattack before their opponents have had a chance to get into their defensive alignment. The ball must still travel at least five meters in the air and cross the five-meter line, before it touches the ground or another player.

Be sure the quick throw in is allowable:
1. The same ball that went into touch is the same one being thrown in.
2. No player, other than the one who is throwing the ball in, touched it since it was released in touch.
3. The ball is thrown in between where it went into touch and the player's defending goal line.
4. If a lineout has not yet formed (two players from each team at the line-of-touch), players who approach the line-of-touch must do so without delay.
Another type of quick throw in can occur when players throw the ball in to themselves. This is permissible if the ball travels at least five meters in the air and crosses the five-meter line before it touches the ground, and goes in straight or towards one’s own goal line before the lineout has formed.

When a quick throw in is not allowed, the ball must be thrown in straight on the line-of-touch, and travel at least five meters before it touches the ground or it touches or is touched by a player.

Quick throw in versus Quick lineout—before a lineout has formed, a quick throw in allows players to throw the ball in straight or towards one’s own goal line, between the line-of-touch and the player’s defending goal line. Once a lineout has formed, a quick lineout requires players to throw the ball in straight on the line-of-touch, but does not require them to wait for the opposition to be ready.

Make sure the ball is released immediately after being carried into touch. Do not allow players to hang onto the ball and delay the game. Penalty Kick.

Do not allow “early jumping” in the lineout. Manage the situation first by resetting the lineout and warning the players to time their jumps correctly. Award a Free Kick if teams persist in jumping early after an initial warning.

The ball must travel at least five meters in the air in the lineout. This means the ball must be thrown in five meters and/or all players must allow the ball to be thrown in five meters. Either rely on your Assistant Referee or move to the front of the lineout occasionally to keep each team honest. Free Kick.

Whenever a ball is thrown forward or knocked on directly into touch (without being played/touched by another player), the Referee must give the option to the non-offending team captain: lineout or scrum. This means allowing the quick throw in (as long as it meets the criteria established by law—see above), which indicates the non-offending team has made its choice. Be prepared, as teams will not want the quick throw in disallowed and brought back because the Referee was not up with play.

Two–handed take. In order to maintain the off-side line, teams sometime choose to hold onto the ball in the lineout instead of immediately tapping it back. Should this happen, watch for backlines creeping up and infringing the ten meters.

Establish control at the lineout by taking a position at the front of the lineout at the beginning of the match. All eyes are on the Referee as he/she sets a full meter gap and ensures that the ball travels at least five meters in the air. Once teams are complying, consider taking a position at the back of the lineout, on the line-of-touch (middle). This will help you to determine if the throw in is straight and place you in a better position for the next phase of play (fewer steps).
Advantage

In Sevens, quality possession IS advantage.

Unpressured possession with options is generally considered Advantage Gained for scrum infractions, regardless of position on the pitch.

Clean possession to the gain line is generally considered Advantage Gained for penalty infractions.

Advantage is a valuable tool for Referees. When properly and consistently applied, it can really open a game up and decrease the number of stoppages while still identifying infractions and maintaining standards.

This requires Referees to know when—and when not—to call for advantage. No law says you must play advantage and not every penalty situation warrants advantage. Unless a try is imminent (probably will be scored), consider blowing up foul play immediately. A quicker whistle at the breakdown, for the first offense (particularly illegal side entry), may also have a positive effect on the match by setting a clear standard and freeing up the ball. Apply advantage when it can lead to open play, but consider forgoing advantage to make a convincing point about foul play and slow ball at the breakdown.

Advantage in Sevens is usually shorter in duration, as opposed to Fifteens. However, do not be afraid to play a long advantage when called for, even if the attacking side appears to be going backwards. It may take them some time to work their way through the defense. During last year’s iRB Sevens World Series, over 40% of the tries scored in the Men’s Tournaments originated in the scoring team’s own half.

No matter how the play develops, always call out (verbalize) “ADVANTAGE (color of team awarded advantage)”, and if over, “ADVANTAGE OVER”. Clear communication to the players is important. It lets the players know you are aware of the infraction, but are willing to allow the non-offending team’s actions to determine play.

Sevens is all about possession. The key requirements are to win the ball and keep the ball.
—Wayne Smith, former New Zealand Sevens coach
The Referee—just one person—must cover a lot of ground during the course of an intense, fast-paced Sevens rugby match. The running lines a Sevens Referee employs are vitally important because the game develops so quickly, and there are fewer players and more space available than in the traditional Fifteens match.

**Vertical coverage**

The most efficient way to cover a Sevens match is to get up and down the pitch as quickly as the players do. This is best accomplished by running straight up and down the pitch, roughly parallel to the touchline. There are occasions where running across the pitch is necessary (i.e. behind the defensive back line), but Referees must always be prepared for line breaks and then sprint to keep up with play. By chasing play doggedly all over the pitch (like a flanker), Referees won’t be able to cover as much ground and may get left behind.

It is particularly important in Sevens to keep up even with advancing play so that you are in line to see forward passes, where a forward pass often results in a try. With fewer bodies on the pitch, you are provided with clearer sight lines to monitor play accurately.

**Horizontal coverage**

Another method for saving steps and running more efficiently is to remain, for the most part, between the 15-meter lines. While not an absolute, staying within the “middle part” of the pitch can keep you close to play and still be effective (with clearer sight lines), and in a better position for the next phase of play (less running across the pitch). You still need to be ready to get out wide quickly when breakdowns occur at the edges of the pitch. Do not just follow a lazy path in the middle of the pitch.

Keeping your legs strong late in the day is one of the rewards for employing smart running lines and running as efficiently as possible. As the intensity of tournament play builds through the knockout rounds towards the Cup Final, Referees need the gas to make their last game of the tournament their finest—when the stakes are at the highest.

*There is no substitute for pace and the ability to accelerate (linear speed) and side step (lateral speed).*

—Lee Smith, IRB Regional Development Manager - Oceania
The figure below is a map of the GPS-tracked movements of an iRB Referee during a recent New Zealand v France Sevens match. During the match, the Referee ran a total of 1825 meters or 5987 feet (over 1.3 miles). The tracking is broken down by the Referee’s speed:

1. Stand still and walk (yellow)
2. Walk and jog (blue)
3. Running (red)
4. Hard Running (purple)
5. High Speed Running (aqua)

The map illustrates several trends:

1. The majority of the Referee’s running lines were roughly parallel to the touchlines, or angled as play came closer to the in-goal. This was the most efficient method for the Referee to keep up with vertical play.

2. The majority of the Referee’s running was within the two 15-meter lines. This kept the referee in position to be accurate at the breakdown and ready for the next phase of play.

Courtesy of Matt Blair and the IRB
Referee Positioning in Open Play

A Referee should be positioned for quick access to the breakdown.

Positioning in open play in Sevens rugby is influenced by several factors—what direction the ball is moving, which side is applying the pressure, and field position. Ultimately, the best position is the one that gets you more quickly to the breakdown or try.

When the attacking team moves forward with the ball and applies pressure on the defense, the Referee should keep up with play and even with the ball. The Referee needs to detect any passes thrown forward and to ensure that the ball is not slowed down at the breakdown. Being out of position means that forward passes will be missed—which usually results in a try in Sevens.

When the defending team moves forward and applies pressure on the attacking team, or the team with the ball backs up hoping to find/exploit gaps, the Referee should take up a position just behind the defensive line. However, he or she must avoid the trap of being too deep behind the defensive line in a desire to get out of the way and not interfere with play. This deep positioning can be self-defeating because the Referee is then too far away to get to the breakdown in time.

If neither team is exerting any real pressure and the ball is being passed from side to side, it is probably best for the Referee to take up a position behind the defensive line and prepare for a line break. Taking up a position between the two teams, in this situation, can often lead to the Referee getting in the way of players and the ball.

Teams that are under pressure are the most likely to commit penalties; being aware of this, Referees can get in a better position to influence events and persuade teams to avoid penalties. Referees on the attacking side of the breakdown can better see what the pressured team is doing to secure possession and ease the pressure.

IN-GOAL

Referees need to follow the ball into in-goal and be in position to accurately determine whether a try has been scored or not. It is important for Referees to take responsibility for each scoring attempt and hustle in-goal to be in close proximity to the touch down. They should not slow down and pull up at the 22-meter line and assume that a try has been scored. Referees must strive to be “in the frame” for EVERY try; to verify that the ball has, in fact, been touched down in-goal, not been knocked on or held up in-goal, and to minimize or inhibit any foul play after the ball has been touched down.

CAN YOU SEE THE BALL?

Referees, who find themselves behind the defensive line at the tackle/ruck, need to come around to the attacking team side to see the ball—the first priority at EVERY tackle, and face the defending back line and keep them onside.

NOTE: The farther you are from a breakdown, the less effective you are. The closer and quicker you are, the easier it is to get it right.
Footwork. Sevens Referees need to keep moving during a match. Some Referees get into bad habits when refereeing less skilled teams and stand still and rely on their speed to catch up with play. However, as the skills and physical abilities of teams increase, this reliance on speed to always catch up will let you down. By moving your feet and continuously working in the direction of play, you will be better able to accelerate and keep up with play as the teams make breaks and sprint down the field. It is far easier to increase your speed when you are already in motion than it is to sprint from a standing start.

NOTE: Constantly adjust your body angle towards play (always directly facing the ball). You will then already be moving in the direction of the break and save the steps necessary to change direction.

NOTE: Top Sevens players spend many hours perfecting their footwork in order to become more efficient and effective in play. They know one or two steps could mean the difference between their being tackled or scoring a try. There is no reason not to extend this thinking to your refereeing; one or two steps could mean the difference between arriving in time to see and make the correct call, or getting there late and only catching the second or third infraction—or missing the call altogether.

Always be alert to the overload or the missed tackle. You have a head start, but you will still need to “get on your horse” if you want to be in the frame with the try. Show some urgency and work hard to be in position to make the correct call.

When a turnover occurs in open play, you need to quickly take up the mirror-image position from where you have just been. This may be one of the trickiest but most elegant of referee transitions, slipping through both lines without affecting either.

When following a player who is running free, you should instantly begin checking your rear-view mirror. You might be on course to interfere with a defender on the far side of the pitch — just at the critical instant! A small mid-course correction, often by merely slowing down briefly, will allow the pace of the players to decide the outcome.

Always yield to the defenders. For whatever reason, you may occasionally find play coming directly towards you. Stop and hold your position. Be prepared to sidestep the action if necessary; then turn and sprint immediately to keep up with play.
**AWARDING PENALTIES**

*You should be prepared for penalties to be taken quickly. Work to allow the quick tap.*

**Penalty Mark**

Work on getting the offenders back ten meters after the team awarded a penalty knows where the penalty mark is. Devote your attention to preventing another penalty, not to running over and indicating a particular spot of grass. Give the mark at penalties (pointing is sufficient) and *get out of the way!*

**Identifying the Penalty Mark**

By pointing to the penalty mark, you can facilitate quick penalty taps and increase the time that the ball is in play. Frequently a Referee will allow play to continue after a penalty infraction to see if an **ADVANTAGE** can be gained. If an **ADVANTAGE** cannot be gained and the Referee blows up play, players from the non-offending team will naturally move towards the Referee for the location of the penalty mark (and take the quick tap). Referees can avoid having to stop playing time and resetting the mark by vigorously pointing back to the original point of the infraction (correct penalty mark) and verbally instructing the non-offending team exactly where they need to go in order to restart play.

**Position**

Find a position at the penalty that works for you, allows you to clearly see the ball, keeps you out of the way and does not slow the game down. Make sure the mark is taken correctly, the ball is kicked out of hand (manage) and ensure the offending team gets back ten meters.

**Work the “10”**

Insist that the offending team retreat ten meters from the mark and do not allow them to slow the quick tap. Use all the tools at your disposal to get those requisite ten meters. Teams not getting back ten meters from the penalty mark eliminate space and have a negative influence on the game.

**Allow some latitude in the taking of the mark.**

Do not call the quick tap back unless it is taken significantly far from the mark (the “manhole rule”), and/or allows an unfair advantage to the non-offending team.
Finding The Balance...

The game of Sevens is like a highlight reel of all of the things that make rugby great. Within every match, we can see amazing displays of well-worked tries, one player putting his team on his back and breaking a match open with a great individual run, huge one-on-one tackles, as well as impossible off-loads and passes through contact. The game of Sevens by its nature is a very quick, high-energy and—most importantly—positive variation on our game.

Finding the balance of where and how to adjudicate the laws can be a serious challenge to those new to Sevens. The referee’s job in Sevens is to facilitate and promote positive play, to allow the match to truly become a series of contests.

Sevens is used as a developmental tool by most of the major international teams, for Sevens allows the players to show off their individual skills moving quickly through contact, multiple phases, and in open play. It’s no different for the referee in Sevens who must show his or her skill in allowing the contest to develop, as the tackle (and possibly the ruck), is clear and open for all to see.

To that end, the referee must quickly punish and remove infringements that bring down the game, or affect a player’s ability to perform as he or she wishes. Understanding this is paramount to understanding Sevens. Quickly penalizing infringements that interfere with the progress of the game helps keep the pace of the game up and the ball in play. In essence, the result of a penalty should reward a team for demonstrating dominance or skills superior to their opponents.

Remembering that sometimes the best advantage can be a penalty further supports this idea. A team that has worked their way successfully through each contest (ruck, maul, scrum, etc.), forced their opponents into an error or isolation and caused them to infringe upon the laws, has earned the right to the ball. They have also earned the right to dictate the next phase of play, whether it is a quick tap or a set piece, allowing positive play to restart.

More serious offenses will require prompt action from the referee to preserve the match. Slowing down the ball, deliberate or repeated infringements, and cynical fouls all show a lack of respect for the game, as it also reveals the player’s desire to not live up to the standards of a match. When a player has shown that he or she no longer cares to play, oblige them because Sevens does not have time for detractors or pests. With the limited amount of time within each match, the game feeds off of high energy and speed. The referee must ensure that the players have a positive work environment in which to create something great.

Mike Kelly
iRB Sevens World Series Referee

The iRB Sevens circuit has proven to be a breeding ground for match official talent over the past decade with many of the world’s top Referees having graduated through the Series. It is the perfect platform for a referee to develop, providing exposure to a high-intensity, high-paced environment that tests both physical and mental skills.

—Paddy O’Brien
iRB High Performance Sevens Referee Manager
FOUL/DANGEROUS PLAY
YELLOW/RED CARD

Foul play is against the letter and spirit of the game.

Use common sense. Manage the game, but be ready to use all the tools available if left with no choice. If something occurs during a match that appears to you to be dangerous play—it probably is—and must be dealt with strictly. Do not hesitate to remove players from the field who are guilty of foul and dangerous play.

Teams are seriously disadvantaged by a temporary suspension and an inaccurate decision may have a major affect on the outcome of the game. Yellow cards should not be given lightly—but when they are deserved, do not hesitate.

Watch for professional fouls and repeated infringements. Do not confuse a blatant intent to spoil (deliberate infringement) with overeagerness. It is okay to award penalties and free kicks as they are part of the game. It is not okay to allow negative play that is clearly intended to spoil.

Always face the ball. Do not turn your back on the ball, even after blowing the whistle. Manage the dead ball and stay involved to calm potential flash points. Pay attention but do not get too close.

I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. BUT I KNOW IT WHEN I SEE IT . . .

— U.S. Justice Potter Stewart, concurring opinion on obscenity in Jacobellis v. Ohio 378 U.S. 184 (1964)
Use common sense!

Judge each tackle on its merit.

Determine fact, not intent.

1. High tackles or those made without the use of the hands/arms.
2. Tackles that begin below the shoulder line but “ride up” and contact the head area.
3. Shirt pulling
4. Throwing or taking the ball away after a penalty award.
5. Repeatedly killing the ball at the tackle. (Again, use common sense.) Killing the ball at the tackle once is worth a penalty, but killing it two or three times should earn a yellow card.

Deal with dust ups with certainty and consistency.

Stay calm. Do not throw gasoline onto what are only embers and cause an inferno.

Keep your hands off the players.

Use your whistle—it is your only weapon. Players are used to reacting to the whistle. It goes off and they stop playing; it goes off and they may well stop wrestling.

Be decisive when things calm down. You may consult the Assistant Referees or In-Goal Judges, but ultimately you are the closest and in charge.
**Time Management**

*Increasing the time that the ball is in play is a major objective of the Sevens Referee.*

With Sevens matches only fourteen minutes long (Cup Finals are twenty minutes long and Fifteens matches are eighty minutes long), time is a very valuable commodity. Exercise sound time management to ensure as many of those minutes and seconds as possible are available for play.

Wasting time, e.g., throwing or kicking the ball away after a penalty or line-out has been awarded, should be **penalized promptly** and roundly discouraged.

The Referee would be well advised to **stop the game clock** and negate any attempts by players to slow play and take time off the clock in order to protect a close lead or cover for their lack of fitness.

**If a scrum or line-out is awarded before time has elapsed,** the Referee will still have the scrum or line-out, regardless of the time on the game clock. If the Referee calls for a scrum or the ball goes out to touch after time has elapsed, then halftime or fulltime is called and play ends.

**The match or half cannot end on an infringement** (penalty kick or free kick), or until play has been successfully completed. A reset scrum or an improper kick at the restart are not successful completions of play.

### Parameters For Allowing Restarts Before Time Runs Out

1. The Referee needs to be aware that the game is getting close to half or full time.
2. If a try is scored with more than forty seconds remaining on the game clock, the Referee will advise the conversion kicker prior to the kick being taken that they will be going back to half way to restart with a kick off. By law, the kicker must take the conversion kick within forty seconds of a try having been scored. Therefore, when the Referee checks the time when a try is awarded (on the scoreboard, or more likely on his/her wrist) and there are more than forty seconds left in the half, the Referee is obligated to allow a restart and plays on until the next infringement. A team that remains behind on points, may elect to skip kicking a conversion after they score a try in order to restart play before time runs out.
3. In the rare instance when a penalty kick is attempted near the end of a half/game, thirty seconds would be the benchmark. If a penalty is awarded with more than thirty seconds left in the half (not when the team decides to kick for goal), then a restart should be allowed.

It is important that the Sevens Referee keep accurate time and clearly communicate game time status to each team. It is not enough for the Referee to be correct in law, but he/she needs to make each team fully aware of the match’s circumstances to avoid any misunderstandings. This becomes even more critical in absence of a stadium scoreboard clock or buzzer/hooter.
Managing The Action . . .

Finding the right formula in the Sevens management equation is not an easy task. Fifteens purists say there is hardly any management in Sevens, but I assure you their point-of-view is a bit skewed. The management challenges may be different; however, there is less time and less room for error when it comes to Sevens. The sooner you figure out what the players’ and teams’ strengths and weaknesses are, the easier and more successful your management approach will be. After all, your job is to give the players a fun game to play and the spectators an entertaining match to watch.

Managing people is a skill, a well-honed skill for that matter. Each person in life has a different set of skills and limitations, and this does not change with each player and team. Your duty as the referee is to identify a player’s and a team’s strengths and weaknesses, compare that with the other players and team, and coordinate a fair, safe environment and contest for all. So where can the referee go wrong in all of this? He or she can overlook the management aspect by solely relying on the whistle and/or the card.

Fourteen minutes is not much time to forge a relationship with players, which makes communication a bigger key to success in Sevens. Some teams and players need more and need the message sent in different ways. Have you ever refereed two teams and no one spoke English? Now imagine refereeing two lower level teams, no one speaks English and their law knowledge is at a beginner’s level. You have two options…are you going to continually penalize them for illegal gate entry when they neither understand what the gate is nor do they understand what you’re saying? If you keep penalizing, you may eventually have to card them. You must ask yourself:

- How have you managed the situation?
- Will it improve during the match at hand?
- How about in the next match with a different referee?
- What message are you sending?

I would argue they would not learn anything except what a penalty whistle tone sounds like and how the sin bin feels. I wonder if they’ll walk away saying they had fun, improved their knowledge of the game, had a fair contest...probably not. For players at all levels, each game is an opportunity to learn, and your job as a referee is to facilitate this.

What could the referee do better in this situation? The referee could communicate differently. If verbal communication is a barrier, body language is not. Start by using crisp, clear signals for all the players to understand and see. This is important for the sidelines and spectators as well as the supporting cast of match officials. Use your downtime, albeit brief and not as prevalent in Sevens, to communicate. Think of universal rugby key phrases. “No” means “no” or is understood in many languages. You must continue working hard to communicate. Restart kicks and conversion kicks are a good time...or at scrums or injury/substitution stoppages. Find the person with whom you communicate the best and make them your ally. Do not get frustrated, and never give up. Keep your composure. I promise, the players will follow your lead, and they will learn to change their behavior if you find the communication/management style that works for them. I’m sure you have heard the saying that goes something like, “You have many tools in your tool belt.” Well, continue working on the ones you have found successful as well as adding new ones.

Good luck!

Leah Berard
iRB Female Sevens Referee Panel
ASSISTANT REFEREES

Teamwork between the Referee, Assistant Referees and In-Goal Judges is absolutely essential.

Quick Line-Outs/Quick Throw Ins
Assistant Referees can assist by signaling and getting to the mark quickly. Remember while a quick throw in does not have to be straight, it must not be thrown forward towards the opponent’s goal line. Make sure the ball is only handled by the player taking the quick throw in.

Assistant Referees have 2 key roles:
1. Running and flagging touch.
2. Reporting on foul play.

It is a bonus if you can help the Referee in any additional way.

Reporting
Make a foul play call regardless of whether you believe the Referee has seen the offense(s). However, you need to be absolutely certain that an offense has occurred; no guessing or being influenced by the crowd.

- Communicate that you have a report as soon as you observe an offense. Call out: 1. (REFEREE’S NAME); 2. I HAVE A FOUL PLAY REPORT ON (TEAM COLOR). Remember that Referees will probably play on until the next infringement—unless they agree with you that the offending team has been able to play on unfairly because of the illegality. Continue your normal touch duties until the Referee stops play.

- At the next stoppage of play, often when a try has been scored, raise your flag and move quickly towards the Referee. The Assistant Referee and the Referee then communicate. The Referee will initiate and lead the conversation. There is no need for a Board meeting, unless the other Assistant Referee or an In-Goal Judge thinks they have something to add to the situation.

- The Assistant Referee will give the offending player’s number and team. (In Sevens there is rarely an excuse for not being able to supply the number!)
  - Concentrate on the offender until the number can be identified.
  - Give a precise and accurate description of the offense.
  - The Referee may request a sanction recommendation:
    1. Severe reprimand (Admonishment)
    2. Formal caution and temporary suspension (Yellow Card)
    3. Send off (Red Card)
If you are in RADIO COMMUNICATION with the Referee, work on the principle of **LESS IS BEST** and only use the system if there is something vital to communicate.
Assistant Referee Positioning

Assistant Referees on the touchline should adopt the leading-trailing positions.

**Appropriate Leading Positioning:**

The leading Assistant Referee is the one on the touchline to where the ball is traveling.

**Appropriate Trailing Positioning:**

The trailing Assistant Referee is the one on the touchline from where the ball is traveling, and remains behind play to watch players behind the Referee—NOT the ball. (This is one of the most difficult aspects of effective touch judging.)

- Be aware of the position of both the Referee and the other Assistant Referee.
- Leading and Trailing positions allow all players to be monitored.
Positioning. You must move from touch in-goal line to opposite touch in-goal line and concentrate fully at all times. It is perfectly acceptable to take a position inside the in-goal area to gain a better vantage point, but make sure you are out of the way of play.

**Primary Duties**
- Adjudicate tries or touch downs
- Adjudicate kicks at goal
- Adjudicate ball dead
- Report foul play in-goal

**Tries**: Move as quickly as possible to a spot where you anticipate having a clear view of an attempted try, and then set yourself into position. It is much easier to see clearly when you are stationary, rather then when you are in motion. Follow or be in line with the player who is attempting to get closer to the posts. Establish eye contact with Referee before offering any decision on play.

**Kicks At Goal**: Position yourself where you are comfortable and be prepared to move.

**Reporting Foul Play**. You are responsible for reporting foul play that occurs in the in-goal area, including after the ball has been touched down.

**The In-Goal Judge and the Referee then communicate**. Use the same practices as the Assistant Referee (page 22).

**Time Wasting**. Be aware that either team may attempt to throw away the ball. Report this to the Referee, who will then make a decision. You can help speed up play after a try by throwing the ball back into the field of play for the conversion attempt if the ball is merely left there by the try scorer.

**While Observing The Ball**, be aware of the environment around the ball carriers. Have they been tripped, etc., in-goal, thereby preventing them from getting closer to the posts? This is very important as conversion kicks are often the difference between winning and losing.
Near The Goal Line: Triangulation

- The Referee will take the inside position of play (towards the middle of the pitch), and is ultimately responsible for the decision-making process.

- The Assistant Referee closest to play will not attempt to get in-goal, but will set up several meters back from the goal line, looking for touch and any pulling back of defenders or support players.

- The In-Goal Judge should try to anticipate play and set up in the best position to clearly see the possible touch down of the ball in-goal.

- The Referee, Assistant Referee and In-Goal Judge will then use the principle of triangulation and take these three different perspectives to make an informed decision.

The term “triangulation” is taken from navigation and military strategy, which use multiple reference points to locate an object’s exact position. Given basic principles of geometry, multiple viewpoints allow for greater accuracy.

Keep in mind that proper triangulation is a lot of work (no Television Match Official), and requires all three match officials to play their part. Teamwork between the Referee, Assistant Referees and In-Goal Judges is absolutely essential and that starts with positioning. Match officials must be in a good position with a clear view of the ball carrier and/or the ball, to add strength to the decision-making process.

When the observations converge and agree with each other, this provides more evidence than just one view and increases the credibility of our Referees and builds more confidence in their decision-making.
Despite all the emphasis on possession, remember that tactical kicking may be useful. A well-placed, well-timed kick into open space may prove to be a match winner.

**Situations In Which Kicking May Be Used**

1. Make a grub or chip kick if opponents come up fast and without a sweeper.
2. Make a grub or chip kick that forces the opposition to turn and chase back.
3. Relieve pressure.
4. Upset the rhythm and composure of a favored opponent.
5. Make a kick down the narrow side.
6. Relieve a stalemate and force something to happen.
7. For touch and the line-out (wind advantage, good jumpers).
8. Make use of conditions, e.g. wind or rain.
9. Kill time or end the game.

**Be vigilant** for the late hit or obstruction that prevents kickers from chasing their own kick. This must be dealt with sternly as it may directly affect the outcome of the game. Possible yellow card and/or penalty try.

**There is no gain** in ground if a team puts the ball back into its own 22 and the ball is subsequently kicked directly into touch. Teams are not able to pass or play the ball back into their own 22 and then kick directly to touch in order to gain ground.

**All kicks** for points must be drop kicks. This includes a penalty goal in the last seconds to win the match.

**Conversion goals** must be taken within forty seconds of a try being scored.

**During attempts** at conversion goals, opposing team members must immediately assemble close to their own ten-meter line. Do not allow them to loiter and distract the kicker.
Referees need more power-based speed in Sevens than in Fifteens. Sevens players are likely to be faster than any Sevens match Referee. That means you need every bit of your speed—backed by stamina.

- The type of fitness and stamina required in Sevens is different from what is required in Fifteens because of the gaps in the day’s play. The Sevens Referee warms up, sweats it out for about fifteen furious minutes, warms down and then waits for the next short burst of activity. In addition, as the day or weekend progresses, the intensity of each game increases because there is more at stake.

- Stretching is very important, pre-game (dynamic) and post-game (static). Attention to hydration, regardless of the temperature, is vital.

- Speed, stamina, poise and composure give you the ability to think and act quickly without panicking.

- Physical fitness is very important. If you are not physically fit:
  1. You may not be able to get to the best positions to referee all the phases of the match, particularly crucial for goal-line decisions.
  2. Your concentration levels will drop as the game progresses.
  3. Your credibility among the players, coaches and other Referees will suffer.

- Mental fitness is equally as important as physical fitness. It is essential that you maintain your concentration for the duration of the game.

- Mental stamina is required to manage pressure from the crowd and the coaches.

IF YOU ARE NOT PHYSICALLY FIT, YOU WILL NOT BE MENTALLY FIT!

In Fifteen-a-side Rugby, the Referee will run 75% of the time at medium speed, 15% at maximum speed and walk about 10% of the time.

In Sevens, the Referee will rarely walk, but runs about 75% of the time at maximum speed and 25% of the time at medium speed.
Sevens is all about **POSSESSION**.
The key requirements are to **WIN THE BALL** and **KEEP THE BALL**.

1. **Attack = possession.** You must have the ability to win the ball and retain it, even when going backwards, sideways and under pressure.

2. **Clear pressure immediately.** You must move the ball away from areas of congestion immediately, rather than pick it up and run. The exception to this is when you’re close to the goal line.

3. **Use the full width of the field.** Stretch the defense, make the gaps bigger.

4. **Maintain depth in attack.** This may require you to step backwards after passing the ball, thus giving the ball carrier an option to pass back to you. A deep attack is effective and has options. Attacking players should always be available.

5. **Support is vital.** Players must support in their zone, rather than chase and have their ‘nose to the ball’ as a support player would do in traditional rugby.

6. **Create options.** As the ball moves towards your zone, create options by changing angles, calling, feinting and generally trying to confuse the defense. Players should try to be a threat to the defense.

7. **Defense = pressure.** Reduce opposition’s time and space. Come up together, and move across as a unit, keeping body angles pointing outwards. There is no off-side from general play.

8. **Man-on-man defense.** Pick up the correct man by counting from the outsides. Communicate who your man is.

9. **Zonal defense.** Mark a man within a zone. If players switch angles, pick up the new player that comes into your zone.

10. **Watch the ball less.** Too much ball watching gives your man the opportunity to change lines/angles and make a break.

11. **Sweep.** Someone must cover kicks-through and breaks. Sweeping can be done by the outside players (thus the defense is umbrella-shaped with the wings back a bit) or there can be a permanent sweeper.

12. **Total defense.** This involves good body angles, covering, picking up a man within your zone, watching the player more than the ball and aggressive ball and all tackles.

—From the *New Zealand Rugby Sevens Handbook*
THE SEVEN TECHNIQUES OF SEVENS

1. **GAIN AND RETAIN POSSESSION:** Possession is 99.9% of the game. By possession is meant quality possession; once won, it must be retained by good, constant support work and good handling. You cannot win without it and the opposition cannot score without it.

2. **AREA DISCIPLINE:** The field should be divided into seven areas (lanes) running parallel to the touchline. A player should be positioned in each area. Positional discipline should be maintained in both attack and defense.

3. **CONTROL TEMPO:** The tempo of the game should be controlled by retaining possession; good support and making the ball do the work.

4. **RUN OFF THE BALL:** As each player passes the ball, they take a stride or two towards the player they have just passed to—thus taking up a position slightly to one side but behind the player to whom they have just given the ball. This will ensure good support for the player in possession. Always try to have one player behind the player with the ball.

5. **NEVER BE ISOLATED:** Always run towards support. No player should ever become isolated.

6. **DEFENSIVE ALIGNMENT:** The best method of defense is the straight-line defense (a straight line of six players, positioned flat across the field opposite their opponents) with cover being provided by a sweeper lying 10+ meters back in line with the ball. The sweeper is supported by the blindside winger. Marking should be man for man with area discipline observed.

7. **PRESSURE:** Sevens is a pressure game. When you have possession of the ball, aim to grasp the initiative and challenge the opposition—always being careful to keep the ball away from pressure. When the opposition have possession, attempt to pressure them into making errors which force a breakdown.

Above all else, Sevens is a thinking game demanding concentration and effort, particularly when you are not in possession of the ball. Running off the ball is vital. Sevens is a game in which everybody is in the game all the time.

—From *RUGBY SEVENS*, by Mike Williams
**Pocket**—All teams must have a playmaker or an outlet player standing in space, directly behind the tackle. The ball can be cleared to this player from the tackle to remount an attack.

*There is an unbending rule that following the breakdown, the ball MUST BE moved away from the area of congestion IMMEDIATELY. It is fundamental that the ball be passed, scooped or kicked out rather than run out from the area close to a breakdown. The exception of course is if a try can be scored.*

—Wayne Smith

*The area that most teams can improve on is getting support players into the pocket and make sure that there is depth in support to ensure continuity in the attack.*

*My three key principles of coaching Sevens are support play, depth and use of width of the field.*

—Gordon Tietjens, New Zealand Sevens coach

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**Sweeper**—A player who covers behind the defensive line is essential to cut-off kicks and cover breaks. If a team has pace, the sweeper can come from the opposite wing and they can defend with seven players across the field. If they lack pace, they should defend with six in the front line as they may not expect the wing to act as sweeper. (It is too far for the player to go, should penetration take place.)

*The sweeper, who is in a fullback position, has a job to shadow the ball and hold up the attack so that the defensive team can get back and regroup. The rule of thumb is the quicker the sweeper, the deeper he can stand. This is why on attack if a break is made you have to try to get the ball to your speed as quickly as possible as the goal is not to give the defensive side time to reorganize their defense.*

—Gordon Tietjens

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**One-On-One Defense**—One-on-one marking is a vital part of good defense. The emphasis should be to concentrate on the player, and not on the ball. (Use peripheral vision to be aware of the ball movement.) Too much ball-watching by defenders can allow their opponents to create openings and overlaps by running off the ball into new positions.

**Zone Defense**—From the outset players will find themselves guarding certain avenues on the field. These will remain their responsibility until a breakdown in play. Players will not always slot into the same area. How well they defend their zone depends on agility, good lateral movement, communication, peripheral vision and decision making.

*Teams should defend inside out, giving the ball carrier only one direction to go.*

—Lee Smith
MATCH OFFICIALS’ OBJECTIVE

To be unobtrusive and accurate—allowing the players to display their skills and provide exciting tournaments leading to ENJOYMENT FOR ALL!

DOBSON IMAGES courtesy RUGBYMAG
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Paddy O’Brien and the iRB for the opportunities...

Matt Blair for sharing information and discussing the science of sport...

Ed Todd for suggesting a Sevens Referee Program...

The Sevens Referee Committee for their expertise and guidance...

Emil Signes for his great questions...

Iris Dobson, Randall Mar and Dave Stephenson for use of their photography...

RugbyMag for their generous permissions...

Peter Watson for the law review...

Kay McNally for her graphic design and layout...

My fellow referees who have taught me so much, on and off the pitch...

...and especially Nola and Liam, whose love and support make it all possible.

Patrick McNally
SEVEN-A-SIDE VARIATIONS

Standard set of variations appropriate to the Seven-a-side Game
Seven-a-side Variations

The Laws of the Game apply to the seven-a-side game, subject to the following variations:

**LAW 3: NUMBER OF PLAYERS - THE TEAM**

3.1 **MAXIMUM NUMBER OF PLAYERS ON THE PLAYING AREA**

*Maximum:* each team must have no more than seven players on the playing area.

3.4 **PLAYERS NOMINATED AS SUBSTITUTES**

A team may nominate no more than five replacements/substitutes.

A team can substitute or replace up to three players. (Please refer to Law Amendment Trials.)

3.12 **SUBSTITUTED PLAYERS REJOINING THE MATCH**

If a player is substituted, that player must not return and play in that match even to replace an injured player.

*Exception:* A substituted player may replace a player with a bleeding or open wound.
LAW 5: TIME

5.1 DURATION OF A MATCH

A match lasts no longer than fourteen minutes plus lost time and extra time. A match is divided into two halves of not more than seven minutes playing time.

Exception: A competition final match may last no longer than twenty minutes plus lost time and extra time. The match is divided into two halves of not more than ten minutes playing time.

5.2 HALF-TIME

After half-time the teams change ends. There is an interval of not more than two minutes.

5.6 PLAYING EXTRA TIME

When there is a drawn match and extra time is required, after a break of one minute the extra time is played in periods of five minutes. After each period, the teams change ends without an interval.
**LAW 6: MATCH OFFICIALS**

6.A **REFEREE**

6.A.13 **EXTRA TIME - TOSS**

Before extra time starts, the referee organises a toss. One of the captains tosses a coin and the other captain calls to see who wins the toss. The winner of the toss decides whether to kick off or choose an end. If the winner of the toss decides to choose an end, the opponents must kick off and vice versa.

6.B **TOUCH JUDGES AND ASSISTANT REFEREES**

6.B.8 **IN-GOAL JUDGES**

(a) There are two in-goal judges for each match.

(b) The referee has the same control over both in-goal judges as the referee has over touch judges.

(c) There is only one in-goal judge in each in-goal area.

(d) **Signalling result of kick at goal.** When a conversion kick or a penalty kick at goal is being taken, an in-goal judge must help the referee by signalling the result of the kick. If the ball goes over the crossbar and between the posts, the in-goal judge raises the flag to indicate a goal.

(e) **Signalling touch.** When the ball or the ball carrier has gone into touch-in-goal, the in-goal judge must hold up the flag.
(f) **Signalling tries.** The in-goal judge will assist the referee in decisions on touch downs and tries if there is any doubt in the referee’s mind.

(g) **Signalling foul play.** A match organiser may give authority for the in-goal judge to signal foul play in the in-goal.

### LAW 9: METHOD OF SCORING

#### 9.B CONVERSION KICK

#### 9.B.1 TAKING A CONVERSION KICK

**Amend**

(c) The kick must be a drop kick.

**Delete (d)**

**Amend**

(e) The kicker must take the kick within forty seconds of a try having been scored. The kick is disallowed if the kicker does not take the kick in the time allowed.

#### 9.B.3 THE OPPOSING TEAM

**Amend**

(a) All players of the opposing team must immediately assemble close to their own 10-metre line.

**Delete (b)**

(c) Delete 3rd paragraph “When another kick is allowed…….”
9.B.4 EXTRA TIME - THE WINNER

In extra time, the team that scores points first is immediately declared the winner, without any further play.

LAW 10: FOUL PLAY

10.5 SANCTIONS

Note: Temporary Suspension: When a player has been temporarily suspended, the player’s period of suspension will be two minutes.
LAW 13: KICK-OFF AND RESTART KICKS

13.2 WHO TAKES THE KICK-OFF AND RESTART KICK

Amend
(c) After a score, the team that has scored kicks off with a drop kick which must be taken at or behind the centre of the half way line.
Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.

13.3 POSITION OF THE KICKER’S TEAM AT A KICK-OFF

Amend
All the kicker’s team must be behind the ball when it is kicked. If they are not, a free kick is awarded to the non-offending team at the centre of the half way line.
Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.

13.7 KICK-OFF OF UNDER 10 METRES AND NOT PLAYED BY AN OPPONENT

Amend
If the ball does not reach the opponents’ 10-metre line, a free kick is awarded to the non-offending team at the centre of the half way line.
Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.
13.8 BALL GOES DIRECTLY INTO TOUCH

Amend

The ball must land in the field of play. If it is kicked directly into touch, a free kick is awarded to the non-offending team at the centre of the half way line.

Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.

13.9 BALL GOES INTO THE IN-GOAL

Amend

(b) If the opposing team grounds the ball, or if they make it dead, or if the ball becomes dead by going into touch-in-goal, or on or over the dead ball line, a free kick is awarded to the non-offending team at the centre of the half way line.

Sanction: Free Kick at the centre of the half way line.

LAW 20: SCRUM

DEFINITIONS

Amend 2nd paragraph:

A scrum is formed in the field of play when three players from each team, bound together in one row, close up with their opponents so that the heads of the players are interlocked. This creates a tunnel into which a scrum half throws the ball so that the players can compete for possession by hooking the ball with either of their feet.

Amend 4th paragraph:

The tunnel is the space between the two rows of players.
Amend 6th paragraph:
The middle line is an imaginary line on the ground in the tunnel beneath the line where the shoulders of the two rows of players meet.

Amend 7th paragraph:
The middle player is the hooker.

Delete paragraphs 9, 10 and 11.

20.1 FORMING A SCRUM

Amend
(e) Number of players: three. A scrum must have three players from each team. All three players must stay bound to the scrum until it ends.
Sanction: Penalty kick

Delete
Exception

20.8 FRONT-ROW PLAYERS

Amend
(c) Kicking out. A front-row player must not intentionally kick the ball out of the tunnel or out of the scrum in the direction of the opponent’s goal line.
Sanction: Penalty kick
LAW 21: PENALTY AND FREE KICKS

21.3 HOW THE PENALTY AND FREE KICKS ARE TAKEN

Amend
(a) Any player may take a penalty or free kick awarded for an infringement with any kind of kick: punt, drop kick but not a place kick. The ball may be kicked with any part of the leg from below the knee to the toe but not with the heel.

21.4 PENALTY AND FREE KICK OPTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Amend
(b) No delay. If a kicker indicates to the referee the intention to kick at goal, the kick must be taken within thirty seconds of the penalty having been awarded. If the 30 seconds is exceeded the kick is disallowed, a scrum is ordered at the place of the mark and the opponents throw in the ball.