



Rucks

- I. Rucks form at most breakdowns
 - A. A breakdown occurs when the ball carrier is “captured” by the opposition. There are several different scenarios possible:
 1. Brought to ground but not held
 - a. Player may get up and continue running
 - b. Caveat to defenders – do not fall on player with the ball who is already on the ground - penalty
 2. Brought to ground and held, but not by a “tackler”
 - a. To be considered a tackler, you must go to ground with the ball carrier and hold him
 - b. If you “tackle” the ball carrier (i.e., force the ball carrier to ground), but stay standing, you are not a tackler, and you must:
 - i. Release the ball carrier once he is on the ground (you can keep a hold of the ball and he must release)
 - ii. Approach the ball carrier from an onside position before going for the ball
 - c. The ball carrier must immediately make the ball available
 3. Tackled (i.e., brought to ground by tackler and held)
 - a. The tackler must release the ball carrier and either get up or roll away
 - b. The tackler may go for the ball from an offside position (that is from the “wrong” side)
 - c. The ball carrier must immediately release the ball
 4. Grasped but stays on his feet and is joined by other players – Maul

- a. A maul forms if at least one player from each team has bound onto the ball carrier
 - b. It is not legal to intentionally take down a maul
 - c. Offside lines (back feet of the rearmost player) arise in mauls
- B. A ruck is formed when at least one player from each team who on his feet contests for and usually over the ball.
- 1. The ball must be on the ground (as opposed to on top of a player on the ground) for a ruck to form.
- II. Rucks – once a ruck has formed:
- A. Only players on their feet can approach and participate in a ruck
 - 1. If you are on the ground you must at least try to roll away if you are near the ball carrier.
 - 2. You cannot “bridge” over the ball, which is to lean over and support yourself with your hands.
 - 3. You cannot leave your feet to dive into the opponents.
 - B. Players must approach the ruck “through the gate”
 - 1. The gate is basically the width of the tackled player and tackler.
 - 2. You cannot come into the ruck from an angle on the side – penalty.
 - 3. You must come from behind or alongside your rearmost teammate.
 - C. You must at least try to stay on your feet
 - 1. You will be penalized for going to ground if you fall over the ball to seal it off.
 - 2. You must make an attempt to bind onto at least one of your teammates.
 - D. Offside line is rear foot of rearmost player on your team
 - E. No hands allowed once ruck has formed – penalty
 - 1. First onside player to breakdown can reach down to attempt to play the ball – at least until ruck is formed.

- F. Ball is out of the ruck when “open” or player from team winning possession has two hands on the ball and starts to move it.
- III. Good Practice
- A. Try to position yourself beyond (as opposed to directly over) the ball
 - 1. Attacking team cannot bind (i.e., lean on or grab for support) onto players on ground and over ball.
 - B. Push through and beyond the ball not just to the ball
 - C. In addition to retaining possession, forming a ruck often helps the offense
 - 1. Sets up offside lines to create separation
 - 2. But also can delay quick ball for next phase of attack
 - D. Tackle strategies
 - 1. Wrap the ball carrier up to prevent offload before brought to ground
 - 2. Turn the ball carrier so facing the wrong direction on ground
 - E. Ball carrier
 - 1. Be careful if you have outrun your support – better to go down and keep possession than lose it trying to get 1 more meter
 - 2. Do not get “stood up” or “held up” when opposing players can wrestle ball away from you (go to ground so they must release and give you an opportunity to offload and retain possession).
 - 3. Place the ball back for your team – makes it harder for defense to poach
- IV. Common Penalties
- A. Not rolling away (tackler)
 - B. Failure to release ball (ball carrier)
 - C. Offside
 - 1. Cheating in front of back foot of last player
 - 2. Charging before ball is out

- D. Entering from the side
 - E. Hands in the ruck
 - F. Player going straight to ground to seal off ball
- V. What Referees are looking for
- A. The first second of a breakdown is the most important:
 - 1. Tackler – is he releasing? Is he rolling away?
 - 2. Ball carrier – is he making the ball available?
 - 3. Other players – are they approaching from an onside position and staying on their feet?
 - B. Is the play constructive or destructive?
 - 1. Trying to make the ball available
 - 2. Trying to kill the ball
 - C. Is the defense trying to gain an unfair advantage (offside, even a little)
- VI. Important Points to Remember
- A. Getting support to the ruck quickly is much more effective than piling on afterward
 - 1. The best opportunity for a turnover is before offensive support can arise

Unless you have an early opportunity for a turnover, committing too many defenders to a ruck often leaves the “line” defense understaffed and vulnerable.