



The IRB Guide to
Experimental Law Variations
August 2008





Foreword by Bernard Lapasset, IRB Chairman

I welcomed the decision by the IRB Council in 2004 to review the Laws of the Game following recommendations that came out of the Conference on the Playing of the Game that was held in Auckland after Rugby World Cup 2003. Subsequently, a lot of hard work has been undertaken by an IRB Laws Project Group which has studied a group of Experimental Law Variations (ELVs) with the assistance of a number of our Member Unions. This ongoing co-operation is much appreciated.

Following this unprecedented work, Council has now approved a global trial at all levels of the Game of certain Experimental Law Variations (ELVs) beginning on August 1, 2008. This decision to implement a global trial represents an important milestone for the future of the Game.

The trial will involve 13 ELVs that have been undergoing practical on field experimentation in approved tournaments around the world over the last two years. This guide introduces these 13 ELVs.

The Laws Project Group will closely monitor the global trial over the next 12 months with the assistance of Member Unions. Then, next year, Council will review all the ELVs that will have undergone trials before deciding if all or any of the ELVs should be accepted into full Law.

Bernard Lapasset

Chairman, International Rugby Board

Important notes:

- **the Laws of the Game, unless specifically amended by the ELVs, remain unaltered**
- **the ELVs also apply to the Sevens and Under 19 Variations**

Experimental Law Variations Summary

Law 6 - Match Officials

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| 1 | Assistant referees are able to assist the referee in any way that the referee requires. |
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Law 17 - Maul

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 2 | Remove reference to head and shoulders not being lower than hips. |
| 3 | Players are able to defend a maul by pulling it down. |

Law 19 - Touch and Lineout

- | | |
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| 4 | If a team puts the ball back into its own 22 and the ball is subsequently kicked directly into touch, there is no gain in ground. |
| 5 | A quick throw in may be thrown in straight or towards the throwing team's own goal line. |
| 6 | There is no restriction on the number of players from either team who can participate in the lineout. |
| 7 | The receiver at the lineout must be 2 metres away from the lineout. |
| 8 | The player who is in opposition to the player throwing in the ball must stand in the area between the 5-metre line and the touch line but must be 2 metres away from the 5-metre line. |
| 9 | Lineout players may pre-grip a jumper before the ball is thrown in. |
| 10 | The lifting of lineout players is permitted. |

Law 20 - Scrum

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 11 | Introduction of an offside line 5 metres behind the hindmost feet of the scrum. |
| 12 | Identification of scrum half offside lines. |

Law 22 - Corner Posts

- | | |
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| 13 | The corner posts are no longer considered to be touch-in-goal except when the ball is grounded against the post. |
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Disclaimer

This *IRB Guide to Experimental Law Variations* product has been developed in the context of the Laws applying to accident and injury prevention and medical practice in Ireland and the information and guidelines incorporated on these matters are made available strictly on the basis that the IRB (including its operating entity IRFB Services (Ireland) Limited and other associated entities) does not accept any liability to any person or entity for loss, cost or damage howsoever arising out of any reliance on and/or use of the information and/or guidelines contained in this *IRB Guide to Experimental Law Variations* product.

Experimental Law Variation 1

Law 6 - Match Officials

Assistant referees are able to assist the referee in any way that the referee requires.

What this means for the Game

When appointed by a match organiser, e.g. a Rugby Union, SANZAR, ERC, etc., qualified touch judges will be known as assistant referees and can, at the discretion of the referee, be assigned additional responsibilities.

This Experimental Law Variation is designed to allow assistant referees to provide additional information to the referee to assist in decision making.



Law text

Law 6 MATCH OFFICIALS

Every match is under the control of **match officials** who consist of the referee and two touch judges or assistant referees. **Additional persons**, as authorised by the match organisers, may include the referee, reserve touch judge and/or assistant referee, an official to assist the referee in making decisions by using technological devices, the time keeper, the match doctor, the team doctors, the non-playing members of the teams and the ball persons.

A touch judge may be appointed by a match organiser or a team involved in a match and is responsible for signalling, touch, touch-in-goal and the success or otherwise of kicks at goal.

An assistant referee may be appointed by a match organiser and is responsible for signalling, touch, touch-in-goal, the success or otherwise of kicks at goal and indicating foul play. An assistant referee will also provide assistance to the referee in the performance of any of the referee's duties as directed by the referee.



Experimental Law Variation 2


Law 17 - Maul

Remove reference to head and shoulders not being lower than hips.

What this means for the Game

Failure of players to keep their heads and shoulders above their hips throughout the maul will no longer constitute an offence.

This Experimental Law Variation is necessary because of Experimental Law Variation 3 (see page 5).

Line of hips

Head and shoulders lower than hips

UNDER CURRENT LAW:	ILLEGAL ❌
UNDER ELV:	LEGAL ✅

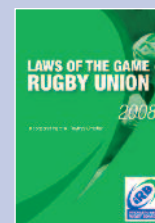
Law text

Law 17.2 JOINING A MAUL

Clause (a) removed:

(a) ~~Players joining a maul must have their heads and shoulders no lower than their hips.~~

~~Penalty: Free kick~~



Experimental Law Variation 3

Law 17 - Maul

Players are able to defend a maul by pulling it down.

What this means for the Game

A defending team may pull the maul to the ground.

To do this, the defender must grasp an opposing player in the maul anywhere between the shoulders and the hips and then pull that player to the ground.

If the maul is brought down by any other action it is regarded as a collapse which remains illegal.



Law text

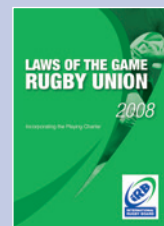
Law 17.5 SUCCESSFUL END TO A MAUL

- (a) A maul ends successfully when the ball, or a player with the ball, leaves the maul. A maul ends successfully when the ball is on the ground, or is on or over the goal line.
- (b) A player may pull a maul to the ground providing that player does so by pulling an opponent in the maul down from the shoulders to the hips.

Penalty: Penalty kick

Law 17.6 UNSUCCESSFUL END TO A MAUL

- (a) A maul ends unsuccessfully if the ball becomes unplayable, or the maul collapses or is pulled down and the ball does not emerge. A scrum is ordered.



Experimental Law Variation 4

Law 19 - Touch and Lineout

If a team puts the ball back into its own 22 and the ball is subsequently kicked directly into touch, there is no gain in ground.

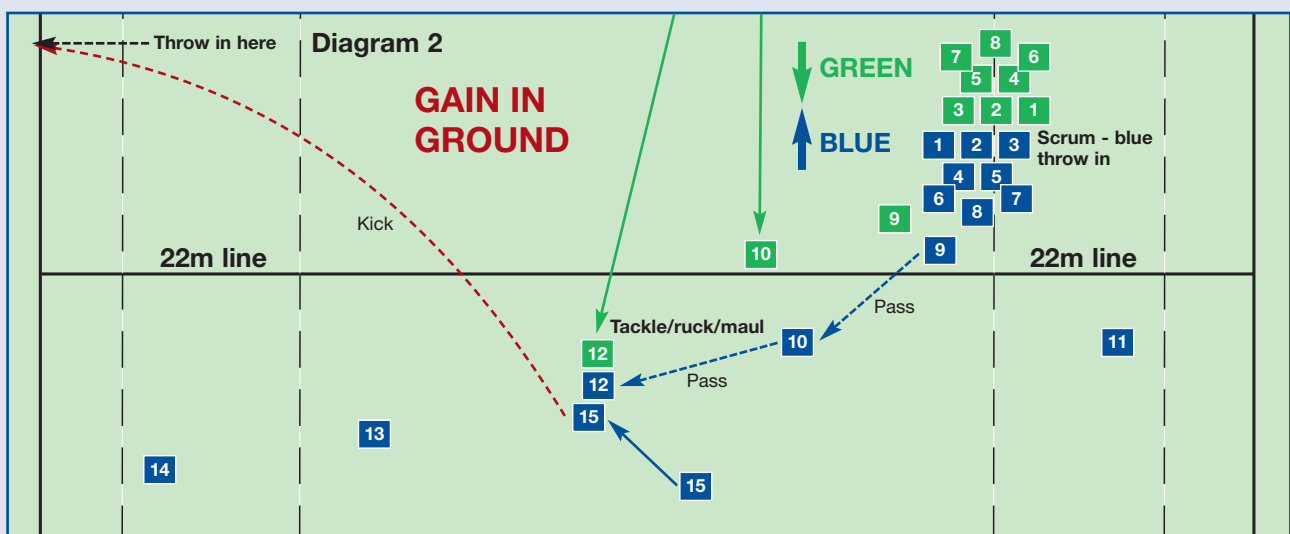
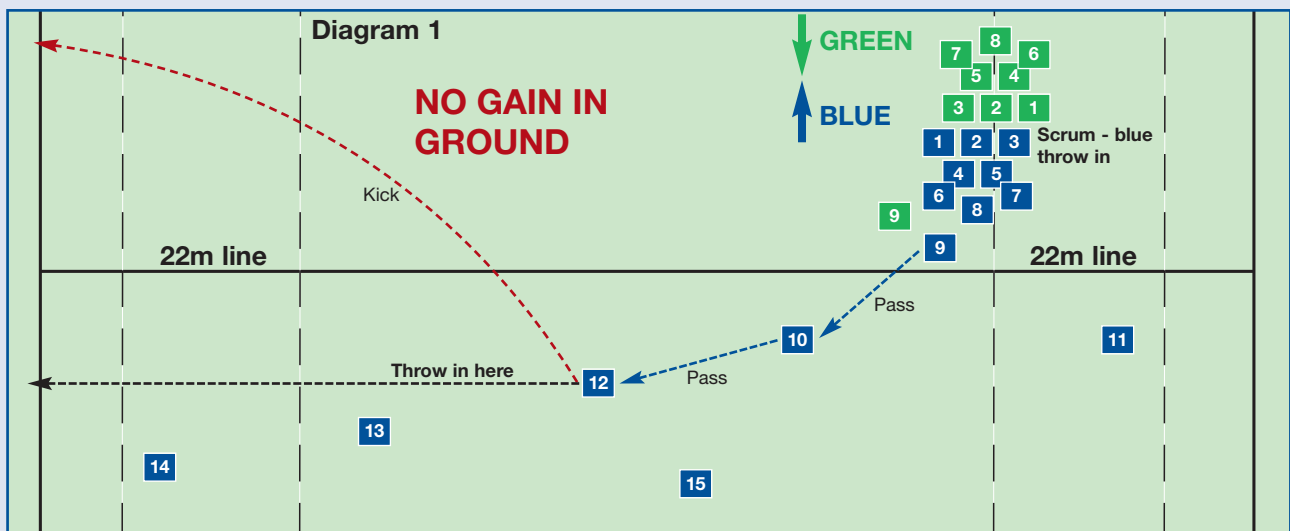
What this means for the Game

Teams will no longer be able to pass or play the ball back into their own 22 and then kick directly to touch in order to gain ground.

In diagram 1, the ball has been passed back into the 22. After two passes and a kick directly to touch the ball has not touched an opposition player, and there has not been a tackle, ruck or maul, so the lineout will take place opposite where the player kicked the ball.

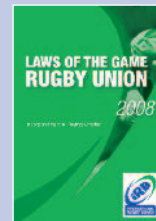
In diagram 2, the ball has been passed back into the own 22, a tackle, ruck or maul has occurred, and then a kick directly to touch has been made, the lineout will take place where the ball went into touch.

This Experimental Law Variation is designed to ensure that defending teams do not have an unfair advantage over attacking teams. It encourages tactical kicking and counter-attacking skills.



Law text

Law 19.1 THROW IN



NO GAIN IN GROUND

- (a) **Outside a team's 22, a team member kicks directly into touch.** Except for a penalty kick, when a player anywhere in the field of play who is outside the 22 kicks directly into touch, there is no gain in ground. The throw in is taken either at the place opposite where the player kicked the ball, or at the place where it went into touch, whichever is nearer that player's goal line.
- (b) **When a team causes the ball to be put into that team's 22.** When a defending player plays the ball from outside the 22 and it goes into that player's 22 or in-goal area without touching an opposition player and then that player or another player from that team kicks the ball directly into touch before it touches an opposition player, or a tackle takes place or a ruck or maul is formed, there is no gain in ground. This applies when a defending player moves back behind the 22 metre line to take a quick throw-in and then the ball is kicked directly into touch.
- (c) **Defending team takes the ball into that team's 22 at a scrum or lineout.** When a defending team throws the ball into a scrum or lineout outside that team's 22 and the ball then crosses into the team's 22 without touching an opposition player and then a player from the defending team kicks the ball directly into touch before it touches an opposition player, or a tackle takes place or a ruck or maul is formed, there is no gain in ground.

GAIN IN GROUND

- (d) **Player takes the ball into that team's 22.** When a defending player plays the ball from outside the 22 and it goes into that player's 22 or in-goal area and it touches an opposition player, or a tackle takes place or a ruck or maul is formed, and then the ball is kicked by a player of that team directly in touch, the throw in is where the ball went into touch.
- (e) **Ball put into a player's 22 by the opposition.** When the ball is put into a team's 22 by the opposition, without having touched (or been touched by) a player of the defending team before crossing the 22 and the ball is then kicked into touch by the defending team, the throw in is where the ball went into touch.
- (f) **Kicks indirectly into touch.** When a player anywhere in the playing area kicks indirectly into touch so that the ball bounces in the field of play the throw in is taken where the ball went into touch.

When a player anywhere in the playing area kicks the ball so that it touches or is touched by an opposition player and then goes indirectly into touch so that the ball bounces in the field of play the throw in is taken where the ball went into touch.

When a player anywhere in the playing area kicks the ball so that it touches or is touched by an opposition player and then goes directly into touch the throw in is taken in line with where the opposition player touched the ball or where the ball crossed the touch line if that is nearer the opposition player's goal line.

Experimental Law Variation 5

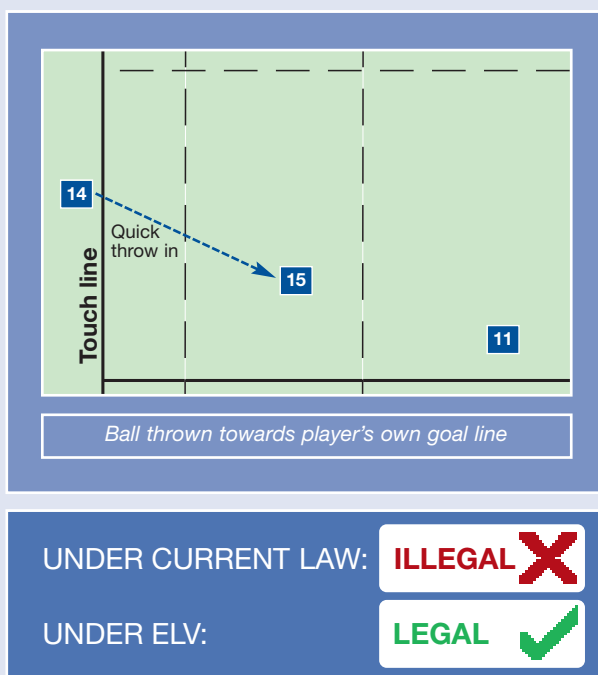
Law 19 - Touch and Lineout

A quick throw in may be thrown in straight or towards the throwing team's own goal line.

What this means for the Game

When taking a quick throw in, a player will no longer be required to throw the ball straight along the line of touch. If an advantage can be gained by throwing the ball directly to a team-mate who is behind the line of touch, this will be legal. The ball must still travel 5 metres before it touches the ground or another player.

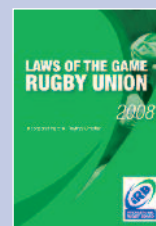
This Experimental Law Variation is designed to increase the likelihood of a quick throw in providing a positive opportunity for the team taking the throw in to run the ball rather than opting for the lineout.



Law text

Law 19.2 QUICK THROW IN

- (e) At a quick throw in, if the player throws the ball in the direction of the opposition's goal line or if the ball does not travel at least five metres along or behind the line of touch before it touches the ground or a player, or if the player steps into the field of play when the ball is thrown, then the quick throw in is disallowed. The opposing team chooses to throw in at either a lineout where the quick throw in was attempted, or a scrum on the 15-metre line at that place. If they too throw in the ball incorrectly at the lineout, a scrum is formed on the 15-metre line. The team that first threw in the ball throws in the ball at the scrum.
- (f) At a quick throw in a player may throw the ball in straight along the line of touch or towards that player's goal line.



Experimental Law Variation 6

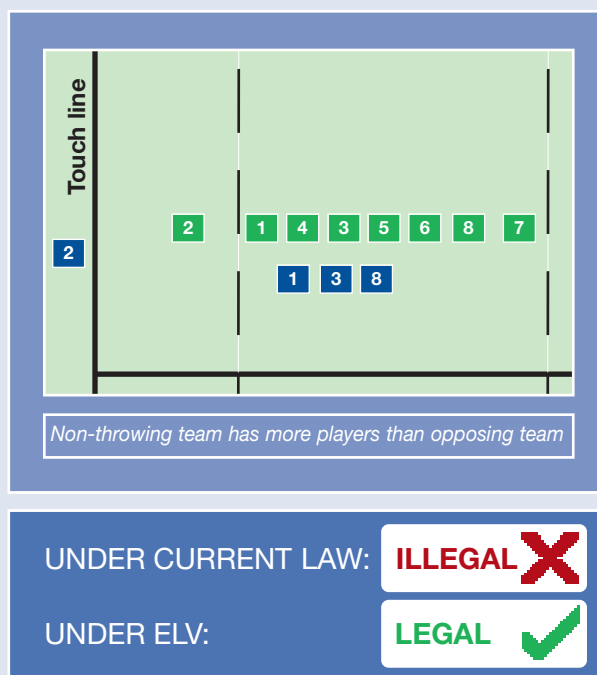
Law 19 - Touch and Lineout

There is no restriction on the number of players from either team who can participate in the lineout.

What this means for the Game

At a lineout the team who is not throwing in the ball will no longer have their number of lineout players governed by the number of lineout players chosen by the team throwing in the ball. As long as there are at least two players from each team to form a lineout, and all lineout players fit between the 5-metre and 15-metre lines, there is no further restriction on numbers.

This Experimental Law Variation is designed to allow teams more flexibility in their tactics at the lineout.



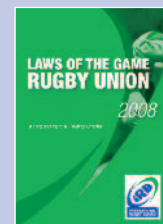
Law text

Law 19.7 FORMING A LINEOUT

- (a) **Minimum.** At least two players from each team must form a lineout. A team must not voluntarily fail to form a lineout.

Penalty: Free Kick on the 15-metre line

- (b) **Maximum.** There is no restriction to the number of players from each team participating in the lineout. Each team can decide how many players participate in the lineout and there is no requirement for there to be an equal number of participants from each team.



Experimental Law Variations 7 & 8

Law 19 - Touch and Lineout

The receiver at the lineout must be 2 metres away from the lineout.

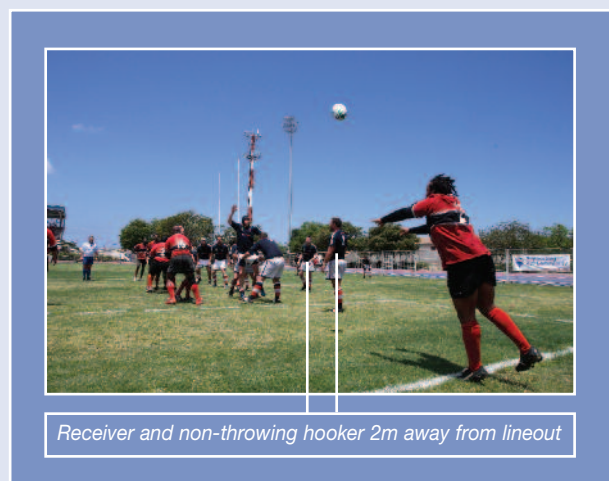
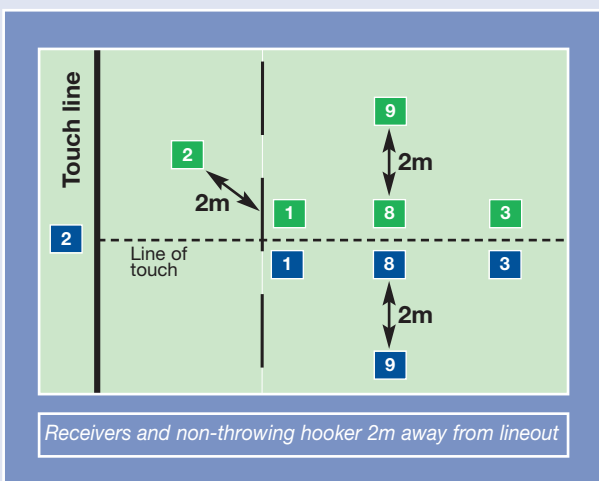
The player who is in opposition to the player throwing in the ball must stand in the area between the 5-metre line and the touch line but must be 2 metres away from the 5-metre line.

What this means for the Game

If a team chooses to have a receiver (a player in position to catch the ball when lineout players pass or knock the ball back from the lineout) that player must be 2 metres away from the lineout itself.

Similarly, the defending team must have a player in immediate opposition to the player throwing in and that player must stay 2 metres away from the 5 metre line.

These Experimental Law Variations are designed to assist the referee in providing a clear 2 metre zone around the lineout. The referee will be able to clearly identify which player is the receiver and will be able to clearly see that the player immediately opposing the thrower is not a lineout player.



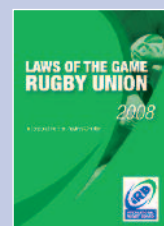
Law text

Law 19.7 FORMING A LINEOUT

- (e) **Where the receiver must stand.** The receiver must stand at least two metres towards that player's goal line from that player's team-mates who are lineout players and between five and fifteen metres from the touch line.

Penalty: Free Kick on the 15-metre line

- (f) **Player between touch and five metres.** The team not throwing in must have a player standing between the touch line and the 5-metre line on that team's side of the line of touch when the lineout is formed. That player must stand at least two metres from the five metres line.



Experimental Law Variation 9

Law 19 - Touch and Lineout

Lineout players may pre-grip a jumper before the ball is thrown in.

What this means for the Game

Players will no longer be required to wait until the player throwing in has released the ball before they grip a player who will jump to catch the ball.



Player pre-gripped before thrower releases the ball

UNDER CURRENT LAW: **ILLEGAL** 

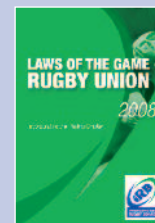
UNDER ELV: **LEGAL** 

Law text

Law 19.9 OPTIONS AVAILABLE AT A LINEOUT

- (e) **Pre-gripping is permitted.** Players who are going to lift or support a team-mate jumping for the ball may pre-grip that team-mate providing they do not pre-grip below the shorts from behind and below the thighs from the front.

Penalty: Free Kick on the 15-metre line



Experimental Law Variation 10

Law 19 - Touch and Lineout

The lifting of lineout players is permitted.

What this means for the Game

Players will be able to lift team-mates in the lineout. However, support players must wait until the ball has left the hands of the player throwing it in before lifting their team-mate.



Player lifted by team-mates after the ball has been released by the thrower

UNDER CURRENT LAW:

ILLEGAL 

UNDER ELV:

LEGAL 

Law text

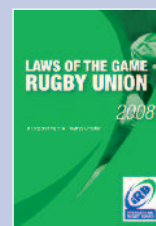
Law 19.9 OPTIONS AVAILABLE AT A LINEOUT

- (f) **Lifting and supporting.** Players may assist a team-mate in jumping for the ball by lifting and supporting that player providing that the lifting and/or supporting players do not support the jumping team-mate below the shorts from behind or below the thighs from the front.

Penalty: Free Kick on the 15-metre line

- (h) **Jumping, supporting or lifting before the ball is thrown.** A player must not jump or be lifted or supported before the ball has left the hands of the player throwing in.

Penalty: Free Kick on the 15-metre line



Experimental Law Variation 11

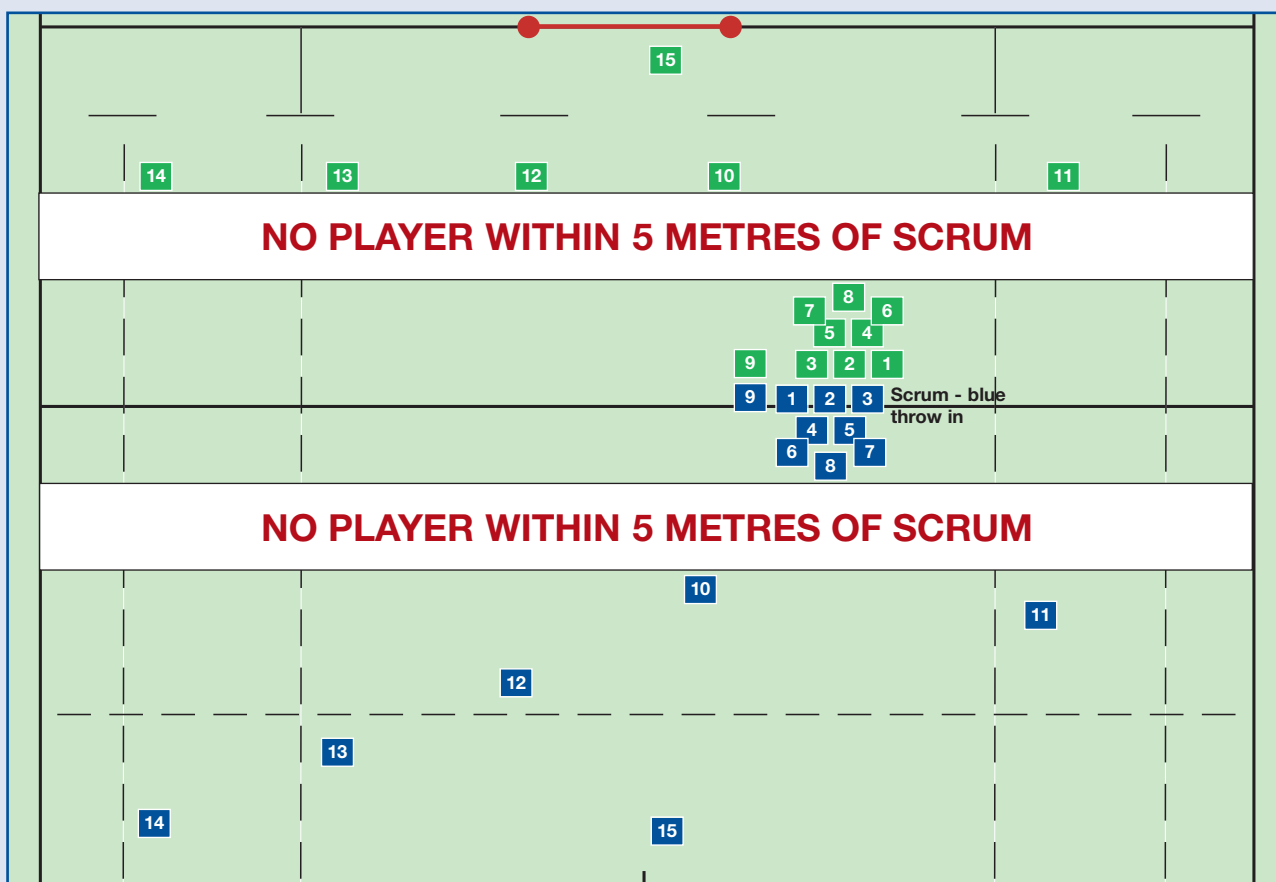
Law 20 - Scrum

Introduction of an offside line 5 metres behind the hindmost feet of the scrum.

What this means for the Game

At the scrum, both back lines (all non-participants in the scrum) must be back 5 metres from the hindmost feet of the scrum.

This Experimental Law Variation is designed to increase the space available to the team who wins the ball at the scrum. By having all the forwards committed at the scrum itself and 10 metres between the back lines, significant space is created in which to build an attack.

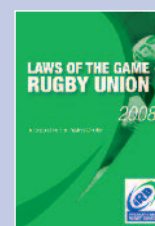


Law text

Law 20.12 OFFSIDE AT THE SCRUM

- (g) **Offside for players not in the scrum.** Players who are not in the scrum and who are not the team's scrum half, are offside if they remain in front of their offside line or overstep the offside line which is a line parallel to the goal lines and 5 metres behind the hindmost player of each team in a scrum.

Penalty: Penalty Kick on the offside line



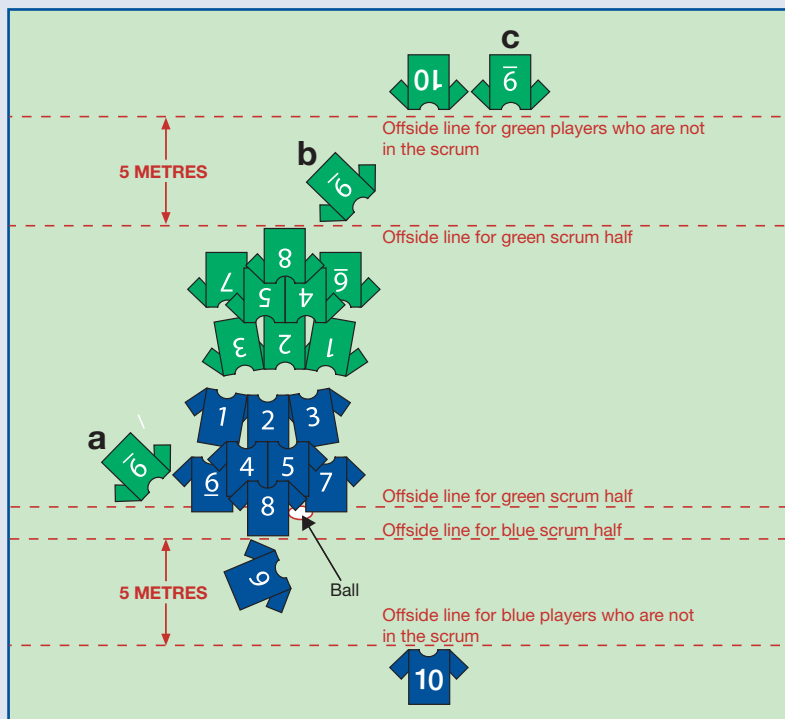
Experimental Law Variation 12

Law 20 - Scrum

Identification of scrum half offside lines.

What this means for the Game

As a result of the introduction of the 5 metre offside line at the scrum, there is a need to establish the offside lines which apply to a scrum half.



Example a

The non-ball-winning scrum half can follow the ball. The scrum half must stay behind the ball which is the offside line.

Example b

The non-ball-winning scrum half may also move to the offside line at the hindmost foot of the scrum but must not move away from the scrum and must not overstep that offside line. The non-ball-winning scrum half can move between the positions **a** and **b**.

Example c

The non-ball-winning scrum half may decide to move to or beyond the offside line 5 metres behind the hindmost foot of that player's team, but once there, must remain behind the offside line until the scrum is over.

Law text

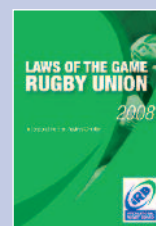
Law 20.12 OFFSIDE AT THE SCRUM

- (d) The scrum half whose team does not win possession of the ball must not move to the opposite side of the scrum and overstep the offside line. For that scrum half that runs through the hindmost foot of that player's team in the scrum.

Penalty: Penalty Kick

- (e) The scrum half whose team does not win possession of the ball must not move away from the scrum and then remain in front of the offside line. For that scrum half that runs through the hindmost foot of that player's team in the scrum.

Penalty: Penalty Kick



Experimental Law Variation 13

Law 22 - Corner Posts

The corner posts are no longer considered to be in touch-in-goal except when the ball is grounded against the post.

What this means for the Game



Player touches corner post before ball is grounded

UNDER CURRENT LAW:

NO TRY ❌

UNDER ELV:

TRY ✅

A try will no longer be disallowed if the ball carrier touches the corner post before grounding the ball as long as that player has not otherwise been in touch.

A try will still be disallowed if the ball is grounded against the corner post.

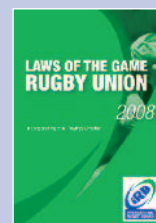
If the ball hits the corner post and bounces back into the playing area, the game continues.

This Experimental Law Variation is designed to avoid tries being disallowed simply because a player has taken out the corner post. It will also serve to simplify the role of the Television Match Official who will no longer need to discern whether the player made contact with the corner post before grounding the ball.

Law text

Law 22.12 BALL OR PLAYER TOUCHING A FLAG OR FLAG (CORNER) POST

If the ball or a player carrying the ball touches a flag or a flag (corner) post at the intersection of the touch-in-goal line and the goal line or at the intersection of the touch-in-goal line and dead ball line without otherwise being in touch or touch-in-goal, the ball is not out of play, unless it is first grounded against a flag post.



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The IRB Guide to Experimental Law Variations

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