



UNDER 10S · UNDERSTANDING THE BREAKDOWN

THE RUCK, EXPLAINED

A guide for U10 parents — what you are watching, how to help your child, and what the referee is looking for.

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Under 10s is a big season. It is the first year your child meets the **ruck** and the **maul**, and the first year there is a real contest for the ball once a player has been tackled. From the touchline it can look like a pile of bodies. It is not: at U10 only a handful of players are ever involved, and every one of them has a job. This guide explains what is going on in plain English, so you can enjoy it, help your child, and follow what the referee is calling.

WHERE THE RULES IN THIS GUIDE COME FROM

Every rule here comes from **RFU Regulation 15, Appendix 4 — the Under 10s Rules of Play**, and the World Rugby Laws of the Game they build on. RFU Regulation 15 for 2026/27 (effective 1 August 2026) keeps these Rules of Play as its appendices; the Appendix 4 page itself still reads “*Effective from 1st August 2025*”. The RFU reviews these rules each August, so if anything here ever disagrees with the RFU page, **the RFU page is right**. Where we give coaching advice rather than a rule, we say so. Links are at the back of the guide.

FROM TACKLE TO RUCK IN FOUR STEPS

1 THE TACKLE

Only the ball carrier can be tackled, and the tackler must use their arms. The tackle must be **below the base of the sternum** — the tummy or below. The ball carrier must not go into contact with their shoulders below their hips, or dip down late and low.

2 THE RELEASE

Once the ball carrier is on the ground, the tackler must **let go immediately and get back on their feet** before they can go for the ball. When the referee calls “**Tackle — release**”, the ball carrier must pass, place the ball back towards their own team, or roll away.

3 THE CONTEST

One supporting player from each team, on their feet, may now: rip the ball and pass it straight away; pick it up and pass it; pick it up and run if no ruck has formed; or join to form a ruck. This is the “jackal” — see page 6.

4 THE RUCK

A ruck is formed when one or two players from each team, **on their feet and in contact**, close around the ball on the ground. At U10 no more than **two from each team** — including the tackled player and the tackler — can be involved.

WHY U10 RUGBY IS BUILT THIS WAY

The RFU describes the U10 contest for the ball as **one player against one player**. Small numbers keep it safe, keep the ball where children can see it, and give every child a genuine chance to win it — which is exactly the skill they will need when the numbers grow at U11.



WHERE EVERY BREAKDOWN STARTS

WHAT IS A TACKLE?

Every ruck starts with a tackle. Two things must both happen — if either is missing, it is not a tackle.

THE OFFICIAL DEFINITION — RFU UNDER 10S RULES OF PLAY

“A ‘Tackle’ occurs when the ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and is brought to ground. A ball carrier who is not held is not a tackled player and a tackle has not taken place.”

World Rugby's Laws say the same in fewer words: a tackle is *“the method of holding a ball-carrier and bringing that player to ground.”*

1 HELD

Gripped by **one or more opponents**, using their **arms**. At U10 the tackle must include the use of arms, and the grip must be **below the base of the sternum** — the tummy or below.

2 BROUGHT TO GROUND

World Rugby: *“Being brought to ground means that the ball-carrier is lying, sitting or has at least one knee on the ground or on another player who is on the ground.”*

IS IT A TACKLE?

TACKLE

Held and brought to ground. The tackle rules apply: the tackler lets go and gets up, and one supporting player from each team may go for the ball.

NOT A TACKLE

Held but still on their feet. They may keep driving forward. Once they stop, the ball must be played away, and the opponent may try to grab it. If a team mate binds on, it becomes a **maul**.

NOT A TACKLE

Not held — a slip, a trip or a dive on their own. A ball carrier who is not held is not a tackled player, whatever happens next.

Who is “the tackler”? In the RFU's words: *“Opposition players who hold the ball carrier and bring that player to ground, and who also go to ground, are known as tacklers. Opposition players who hold the ball carrier and do not go to ground are not tacklers.”*

SAFE TECHNIQUE

Coaching points from World Rugby's Rugby Ready. Contact is coached at training — see page 8.

THE TACKLER

- ✓ **“Eyes up”** looking at the ball carrier to keep the head in the correct position
- ✓ Head **behind or to one side** of the ball carrier — never in front
- ✓ Use the arms to **“wrap”** around the ball carrier
- ✓ A body position that is strong, stable and low
- ✓ Keep the legs driving to bring the ball carrier to ground

THE BALL CARRIER

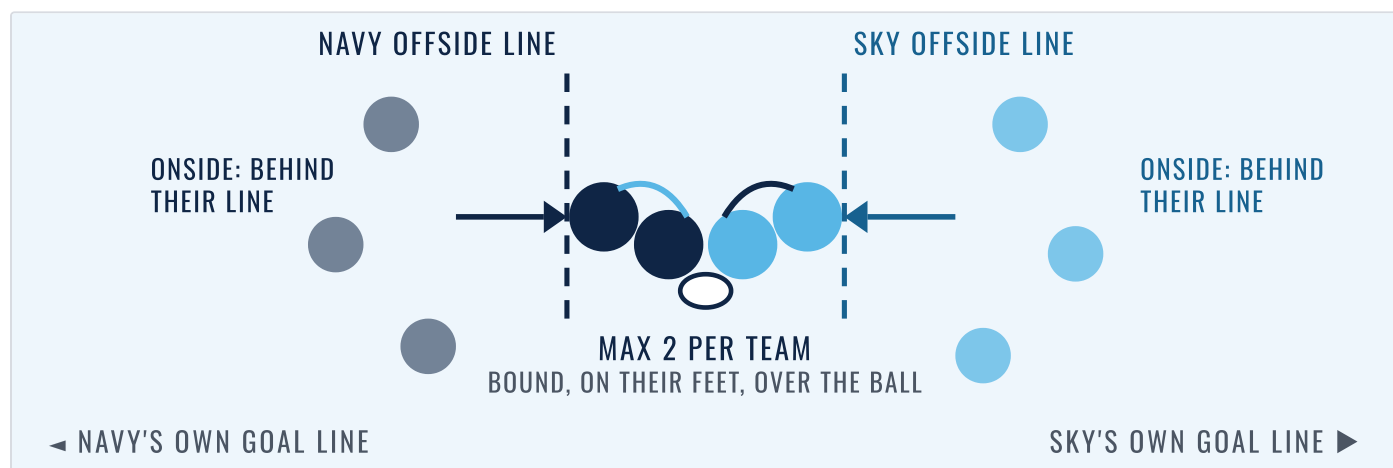
- ✓ Carry the ball in both hands
- ✓ Protect the ball — tight to the chest, elbows in
- ✓ Land on the buttocks, then the shoulder
- ✓ Don't break the fall with a hand or the ball

THE RULES

THE RUCK AND MAUL AT U10

THE RUCK

HOW MANY	No more than two players from each team , including the ball carrier and their opponent.
JOINING	From their own side — from the direction of their own goal line — driving over the ball to move their opponents away from it.
ON THEIR FEET	Everyone in a ruck must stay on their feet. Diving off your feet gives the other team a free pass.
NEXT PLAYER	Once a ruck has formed, the next arriving player must pass the ball — they cannot run with it.
“USE IT”	When the ball is clearly won and ready, the referee calls “Use it” . The team has five seconds to play it, or the other team gets a free pass.
SUPPORT	Team mates must not stand either side of, and close to, the ball carrier to stop defenders making the next tackle.



Seen from above: two per team, joining from their own side along the arrows. Everyone else stays behind their team's offside line (explained on page 4).

THE MAUL

A maul starts when the ball carrier is **held on their feet** by one or two opponents and a team mate binds on — at least three players, all standing. Again **no more than two per team**. The ball must be made available within five seconds, or the team not in possession when the maul began gets a free pass.

Looking ahead to U11: under this season's rules, rucks and mauls go up to **three per team**, and not using the ball in time becomes a **scrum** to the other team instead of a free pass.



WORLD RUGBY · BREAKDOWN READY

WHO DOES WHAT AT THE BREAKDOWN

World Rugby's **Breakdown Laws** — **Dos and Don'ts** sets out, player by player, what everyone at a tackle must and must not do. Here it is in brief, with a note wherever the U10 rules add something.

LAW 14 · TACKLE

THE TACKLER

DO

- ✓ Let go of the ball and the ball carrier **immediately** once both are on the ground
- ✓ Move away from the tackled player and the ball, or get up
- ✓ Be **back on your feet** before trying to play the ball
- ✓ Let the tackled player release the ball and move away

DON'T

- ✗ Compete for the ball while still on the ground
- ✗ Stop the tackled player releasing the ball

At U10: arms must be used, and the tackle must be below the base of the sternum.

LAW 14 · TACKLE

THE TACKLED PLAYER

DO

- ✓ Place or play the ball **immediately**
- ✓ Present the ball in one clear movement as you land

DON'T

- ✗ Take a second movement to buy time — rolling, crawling or bouncing
- ✗ Stop, re-roll or crawl on your elbows to gain an advantage

At U10: on “Tackle — release”, pass, place the ball back towards your team, or roll away. Squeezeball gives away a free pass.

LAW 15 · RUCK

THE FIRST ARRIVING PLAYER — THE JACKAL

DO

- ✓ Be on your feet, joining from **behind the offside line**
- ✓ If you were also the tackler, show a **clear release** first
- ✓ Support your own body weight the whole time
- ✓ Go for the ball and lift it legally

DON'T

- ✗ Go to ground and then reset
- ✗ Handle the ball once a ruck has formed

At U10: only **one** supporting player from each team may go for the ball, and a ripped ball must be passed straight away.

LAW 15 · RUCK

OTHER ARRIVING PLAYERS

DO

- ✓ Enter **alongside, not in front of**, the hindmost player
- ✓ Be on your feet, joining from behind your offside line
- ✓ **“Drive not dive”** — bind and drive rather than diving in

DON'T

- ✗ Enter from the side — through the “gate” only
- ✗ Dive in, or tackle arriving opponents
- ✗ Target or drop your weight onto a jackal's legs

At U10: no more than **two per team** in the ruck, including the tackled player and tackler.

WORLD RUGBY, LAW 15 GUIDANCE

“Once a ruck has formed, no player may handle the ball unless they were able to get their hands on the ball before the ruck formed and stay on their feet.”

OFFSIDE AT THE BREAKDOWN

AT THE TACKLE

The offside line is the hindmost foot of the hindmost player of each team. Everyone else must get back behind the tackled player and the tackler.

AT THE RUCK

The hindmost point of any player of each team in the ruck. **Defenders must stay between their own goal line and the tackled player until the pass is made.**

AT THE MAUL

The hindmost point of any player of each team in the maul.



THE MOST IMPORTANT SAFETY SKILL

A GOOD BIND

The bind is what makes a ruck safe. A player who arrives properly bound pushes and drives; a player who arrives without one simply crashes in. That difference is the difference between a legal ruck and foul play.

WHAT A BIND IS — WORLD RUGBY, LAWS OF THE GAME

"Grasping another player's body firmly between the shoulders and the hips with the whole arm in contact from hand to shoulder."

THE WHOLE ARM

From **hand to shoulder**, wrapped around the body **between the shoulders and the hips**. A hand on a shoulder, or a fistful of shirt, is not a bind.

BIND FIRST

The bind must come **before, or at the same moment as**, contact — never after. Players may bind onto a team mate or an opponent (Law 15).

REACHING IS NOT BINDING

Arriving without a bind is **charging**, which is foul play (Law 9.20a). World Rugby has also ruled that **attempting** a bind but not completing it is not enough.

A GOOD BIND LOOKS LIKE

- ✓ A whole arm wrapped around, hand to shoulder
- ✓ Gripping between the shoulders and the hips
- ✓ Bound on as they arrive, not after
- ✓ Head and shoulders above the hips, eyes up
- ✓ Feet wide, legs driving forwards over the ball

NOT A BIND

- ✗ A hand on a shoulder or a grab at a shirt
- ✗ An arm reaching out as they hit
- ✗ Arm tucked in, leading with the shoulder
- ✗ Crashing in first and grabbing afterwards
- ✗ Head down, hips higher than the shoulders

BODY POSITION

World Rugby's safety programme, Rugby Ready, asks arriving players for a **strong, stable body position, with head and shoulders above hips at all times**, and **"eyes up"** to keep the head and neck in a good position. Players drive over the ball rather than diving in, and they never jump on top of a ruck or deliberately fall on the ball.

COACHING ADVICE

Two cues that survive a Sunday morning: **"Wrap, then push"** and **"Eyes up."** If your child can tell you both, they have the heart of it.

SQUEEZEBALL — BANNED IN AGE GRADE RUGBY

Squeezeball is when the ball carrier goes to ground **head first** (touching or close to the ground), usually parallel to the touchline, holds the ball to their chest and, on the ground, **pushes it back between their legs**. It puts the head and neck in harm's way.

- At U10 it gives the other team a **free pass**.
- Nobody teaching or coaching rugby may teach or encourage it — so it is a coaching offence as well as a playing one.
- **How to spot it:** head going down towards the grass, body face-down and low, ball pushed back through the legs — rather than a player who goes down with their head clear and places the ball back at arm's length.



WINNING THE BALL

THE JACKAL

You will hear coaches shout “jackal!” The jackal is the player who gets to a tackle first, stays on their feet, and goes straight for the ball before a ruck can form. Done well, it is one of the best skills in the game. Done badly, it gives away a free pass.

WORLD RUGBY'S DEFINITION

“The jackler/stealer is the first arriving team-mate of the tackler at the tackle. They must remain on their feet to contest directly onto the ball. If previously involved in the tackle, they must first clearly release the ball carrier before contesting for the ball.”

WHAT THE JACKAL MAY DO AT U10

After a tackle, **only one supporting player from each team** may go for the ball, and they must **stay on their feet**. That player may:

RIP IT

Take the ball from the tackled player — but **must pass it immediately** to a team mate.

PICK IT UP AND PASS

Lift the ball and pass it away from the contact area.

PICK IT UP AND RUN

Only **if a ruck has not formed**.

JOIN TO FORM A RUCK

From their own side, driving over the ball. Once it is a ruck, the ball is won with the feet, not the hands.

A STRONG JACKAL POSITION

Coaching advice, based on World Rugby's Breakdown Ready guidance.

- 1 ARRIVE ON YOUR FEET** — and from your own side, behind the tackled player. Never from the side.
- 2 GET LOW AND WIDE** — feet apart, knees bent, hips low, like sitting on an invisible chair.
- 3 BACK FLAT, EYES UP** — chest up and head up, looking at the ball, never down at the grass.
- 4 HANDS STRAIGHT ONTO THE BALL** — and hold your own weight. Do not lean on the tackled player or go to ground.
- 5 IF YOU MADE THE TACKLE** — let go of the ball carrier and get up first. Only then go for the ball.
- 6 RIP AND PASS** — at U10 a ripped ball must be passed straight away.

Why it is a great skill for your child: balance and strength in a safe, upright position, reading the game to get there first, and bravery with the head kept up and out of danger — a skill they will use at every age from here.



FOR VOLUNTEER REFEREES — AND CURIOUS PARENTS

REFEREEING THE RUCK

Many U10 games are refereed by a coach or a parent volunteer. If that is you — or you would simply like to understand the whistle — this routine works through a breakdown in the order things happen. The routine is practical advice; the rules it enforces are the RFU's.

- 1 WAS THE TACKLE LEGAL?** Arms used, and contact below the base of the sternum. Above it: stop the game, speak to the player, remind them of the rule, and award a free pass.
- 2 RELEASE.** Call “**Tackle — release**”. The tackler lets go and gets up; the ball carrier passes, places the ball back or rolls away.
- 3 ONE EACH.** Only one supporting player from each team can go for the ball, on their feet.
- 4 IS IT A RUCK?** Say so clearly. Many referees call “**Ruck!**” so that everyone knows hands are now off the ball.
- 5 NUMBERS.** Two per team, including the tackled player and the tackler. Talk a third player out *before* they commit.
- 6 GATE AND FEET.** Own side, on their feet, bound, and driving over the ball.
- 7 OFFSIDE.** Hindmost point of each team in the ruck; defenders stay behind the tackled player until the pass.
- 8 “USE IT”.** Five seconds — then a free pass to the team not in possession.

WHEN EVERYTHING HAPPENS AT ONCE

Safety first, then offside, then keeping the game flowing.

The RFU asks referees to sanction only infringements that affect the other team, and to **play advantage wherever it is safe** to do so.

MANAGING THE GAME

- Talk more than you whistle — short, calm words by name or shirt colour prevent most offences.
- Give a one-line reason every time you stop play; children learn from it.
- There is **no sin bin** at U10. Repeated problems are sorted out with the coaches, and the sides stay equal.

A FREE PASS IS AWARDED FOR

- Contact above the base of the sternum
- A fend or hand-off
- Offside, where there is no advantage
- Diving off the feet
- The ball not played away once forward momentum stops
- Not using the ball within five seconds of “Use it”
- Squeezeball, foul play, or kicking of any kind
- Contesting, pushing or striking in the scrum

WANT TO REFEREE PROPERLY?

England Rugby's entry course is **Ready 2 Referee**, and Devon RFU supports new referees locally. Both links are on the last page. Most of the skill is the routine above — practised, calm, and said out loud.



YOUR PART IN IT

HELPING YOUR CHILD

AT HOME

Coaching advice — keep contact for training.

- **Practise the strong position.** Feet wide, knees bent, back flat, chest up, eyes up. Hold it for ten seconds and make it a game.
- **Practise the bind standing still.** Let them wrap their whole arm around you, hand to shoulder, and feel the difference between a bind and a grab.
- **Leave contact to the coaches.** Rucking, tackling and clearing out belong at training, with proper supervision.
- **Talk about the game.** Ask what the referee called, and why.

ON THE TOUCHLINE

- **Praise the right things** — a good bind, staying on their feet, passing when the referee says “Use it”.
- **Let the coaches coach.** Instructions from the side are hard to follow in the middle of a ruck.
- **Respect the referee.** It is very often a volunteer, refereeing to help children learn.
- **Cheer effort** from both teams. Our values are the game's values: Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship.

CONCUSSION

The UK Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport sum it up in five words: **“If in doubt, sit them out.”** Nobody should return to sport within 24 hours of a suspected concussion, and the guidelines advise calling **NHS 111** within those 24 hours.

England Rugby's free **HEADCASE** e-learning has a version written for parents of age grade players. It explains how to recognise concussion and what to do, and takes about half an hour.

READ MORE: PARENTS, WELFARE AND CONCUSSION

AGE GRADE RUGBY

[RFU — Age Grade Rugby overview](#)

englandrugby.com/play/parents-guardians/age-grade-rugby-overview

CONCUSSION

[RFU — HEADCASE concussion information](#)

englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/headcase

UK GUIDANCE

[UK Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport](#)

sportandrecreation.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/concussion/concussion-guidelines-for-grassroots-sport

BEHAVIOUR

[RFU — Code of conduct](#)

englandrugby.com/play/parents-guardians/code-conduct

FREE COURSE

[RFU — HEADCASE e-learning](#)

englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/headcase-e-learning

Questions? Speak to your child's coach or your Parent Rep.



SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

FIND OUT MORE

The rules come from the RFU; the laws, definitions and safety programmes from World Rugby. Every link was checked on the day this guide was created — tap a title to open it. Links on welfare and concussion are on page 8.

THE RULES

U10 RULES

[RFU — Under 10s Rules of Play \(Reg. 15, Appendix 4\)](#)

[englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby/regulation-15-appendix-4-u10-rules-of-play](#)

NEXT SEASON

[RFU — Under 11s Rules of Play \(Reg. 15, Appendix 5\)](#)

[englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby/regulation-15-appendix-5-u11-rules-of-play](#)

ALL AGE GRADES

[RFU — Regulation 15: Age Grade Rugby](#)

[englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby](#)

ON ONE PAGE

[RugbyReferee.net — U10 regulations, season 2026/27 \(PDF\)](#)

[rugbyreferee.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/2026-27-u10s-RRNet-RFU-Regulations.pdf](#)

THE LAWS AT THE BREAKDOWN

EVERY LAW

[World Rugby — Laws of the Game 2026 \(PDF\)](#)

[passport.world.rugby/media/jxrnmpk/2026en-laws-of-the-game-compressed.pdf](#)

THE TACKLE

[World Rugby — Law 14: Tackle](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/14-tackle](#)

THE MAUL

[World Rugby — Law 16: Maul](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/16-maul](#)

BINDING RULING

[World Rugby — Clarification 1-2026 \(2 March 2026\)](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/law-clarifications/2026/clarification-1-2026](#)

DEFINITIONS

[World Rugby — Definitions \(tackle, bind, ruck...\)](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/definitions](#)

THE RUCK

[World Rugby — Law 15: Ruck](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/15-ruck](#)

DOS & DON'TS

[World Rugby — Breakdown laws: dos and don'ts](#)

[passport.world.rugby/injury-prevention-and-risk-management/breakdown-ready/breakdown-laws-dos-and-donts](#)

CHARGING

[World Rugby — Charging into the ruck \(guideline, Feb 2010\)](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/law-application-guidelines/charging-into-the-ruck-february-2010](#)

SAFE TECHNIQUE

TACKLING

[World Rugby — Rugby Ready: The tackle](#)

[passport.world.rugby/injury-prevention-and-risk-management/rugby-ready/the-tackle](#)

TACKLE STAGES

[World Rugby — Tackle Ready](#)

[passport.world.rugby/injury-prevention-and-risk-management/tackle-ready](#)

INJURY PREVENTION

[RFU — Activate injury prevention programme](#)

[englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/activate](#)

RUCKING

[World Rugby — Rugby Ready: The ruck](#)

[passport.world.rugby/injury-prevention-and-risk-management/rugby-ready/the-ruck](#)

THE BREAKDOWN

[World Rugby — Breakdown Ready](#)

[passport.world.rugby/injury-prevention-and-risk-management/breakdown-ready](#)

CONTACT & LOAD

[RFU — Age Grade contact training, match load and recovery](#)

[englandrugby.com/run/coaching/coach-resources/contact-guidance](#)

REFEREEING

JUNIOR RUGBY

[RugbyReferee.net — Refereeing junior rugby](#)

[rugbyreferee.net/refereeing-junior-rugby](#)

REFEREE COURSE

[RFU — How to book a Ready 2 Referee course](#)

[help.rfu.com/support/solutions/articles/103000161012](#)

LOCALLY

[Devon RFU — Become a rugby referee](#)

[devonrfu.co.uk/become-a-rugby-referee](#)