



UNDER 13S · A BIGGER, FASTER GAME

FLY HACKS, THE SIN BIN & 13-A-SIDE

A guide for U13 parents — what changes in open play this season, and what the referee is looking for.

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Under 13s is a big step. The pitch is nearly full size, there are thirteen players a side, and a few things your child has never been allowed to do become part of the game — including kicking a loose ball along the ground. For the first time a player can also be sent to the **sin bin**. This guide explains the changes in plain English. The new six-player pushing scrum has its own guide.

WHERE THE RULES IN THIS GUIDE COME FROM

Every rule here comes from **RFU Regulation 15, Appendix 7 — the Under 13s Rules of Play**, and the World Rugby Laws of the Game they build on. The RFU page reads “Effective from 1st August 2025”; RFU Regulation 15 for 2026/27 still points to these Rules of Play, so they are current this season. Comparisons with last season come from the RFU's Under 12s page and RugbyReferee.net's 2026/27 grid, and a few details from RugbyReferee.net are marked. If anything here disagrees with the RFU page, **the RFU page is right**. Coaching advice is labelled as advice.

WHAT IS NEW AT U13

1 13-A-SIDE, BIGGER PITCH

Up to **13 players** a side on a pitch up to **90 by 60 metres**, with a real **22-metre line**. Halves are up to **25 minutes**.

2 FLY HACKS ALLOWED

Kicking the ball **when it is on the ground** — a “fly-hack” — is allowed for the first time.

3 THE SIN BIN

A player can be **temporarily suspended**. At U13 the time in the sin bin is **5 minutes**.

4 10 METRES, NOT 7

At kick-offs, free kicks and free passes, opponents now go **10 metres** back. Kick-offs must travel 10 metres.

CARRIED ON FROM U12

The **hand-off below the armpits** arrived at U12 and carries on. So do rucks and mauls with **no limit on numbers**, and **free kicks rather than penalties** for offences. See page 4.



LAST SEASON AND THIS SEASON

A BIGGER GAME

	U12 LAST SEASON	U13 THIS SEASON
Players a side	12	13
Pitch (plus in-goal)	60 × 43 m, a 15-metre line as the "22"	90 × 60 m, with the 22-metre line
Each half	20 minutes	25 minutes
Kick-offs must travel	7 metres	10 metres
Opponents at a free kick	7 metres back	10 metres back
Free pass after touch	5 m in, opponents 7 m back	10 m in, opponents 10 m back
Offside at a kick	Within 7 metres	Within 10 metres
Fly-hacking	Not allowed	Allowed
Sin bin	None — sides stay equal	5 minutes
Scrum	5 players, no pushing	6 players, push up to 1.5 m
Hand-off	Below the armpits	Below the armpits

Sources: RFU Under 12s and Under 13s Rules of Play; RugbyReferee.net 2026/27 grid (sin bin, U12 halves). The game also ends early if the score difference becomes more than six tries (RugbyReferee.net).

KICK-OFFS AND RESTARTS

THE KICK A **drop kick** from the centre of halfway starts each half and restarts play after a score. The team that was scored against chooses to **kick or receive**. The other team must be **10 metres** back.

TOO SHORT Not 10 metres, touched first by the kicking team, or straight into touch: the other team chooses a **scrum** at halfway or a **re-kick**. If an opponent plays it first, play carries on.

22 DROP-OUT When the attack kicks the ball into in-goal and a defender grounds it, or the attack kicks, sends or carries it into in-goal and it goes over the dead ball line or touch-in-goal.

IN-GOAL There are **no try-line drop-outs** until U14. An attacker **held up** in in-goal: 5-metre scrum, attack's ball. A **knock-on in in-goal**: 5-metre scrum, defence's ball (RugbyReferee.net, from RFU clarification).

WHY 10 METRES MATTERS

Ten metres is the adult distance. Your child will see defenders **turning and running back** at every free kick, and a team taking a free kick **quickly** before they have got there. Under World Rugby's law, a defender who has not yet retreated must not take part in play until they have.



THE BALL ON THE GROUND

FLY HACKS AND KICKING

A **fly-hack** is kicking the ball when it is on the ground. At U13 it is allowed for the first time. On a wet day, or with a ball squirting loose, you will see players hack it on and chase.

ALLOWED

- ✓ **Kicking a loose ball** along the ground
- ✓ **Kicking from the hand** in open play
- ✓ A scrum half at a ruck may **pass, or pick up and go** (RugbyReferee.net)
- ✓ A free kick taken **quickly** (RugbyReferee.net)

NOT ALLOWED

- ✗ **Box kicks** and **drop goals**
- ✗ Trying to **kick the ball out of a ball carrier's hands** (World Rugby Law 9)
- ✗ **Kicking a player** — that is foul play (World Rugby Law 9)
- ✗ Lineouts and the **50:22** — not until U14 and U15 (RugbyReferee.net)

COACHING ADVICE

A fly-hack gives up control of the ball. Coaches will usually want players to **pick the ball up** when they can — the RFU rules still say players should be encouraged to pick it up and play on their feet. The hack is for when picking up is not possible.

OFFSIDE WHEN A TEAM MATE KICKS

A player is offside if they are **not behind the ball** when it is kicked, or within **10 metres** of an opponent waiting to play it (or where it will land). World Rugby calls this the **10-metre law**: players in front of the kicker must **retire** behind an imaginary line 10 metres from where the ball lands, and must not interfere with play.

KICKS INTO TOUCH

FROM OUTSIDE YOUR OWN 22

Straight into touch: a **free pass** to the other team, **10 metres in**, level with where it was kicked.

FROM INSIDE YOUR OWN 22

Straight into touch by the defending team: the free pass is level with where the ball **crossed the touchline** — unless a team mate passed it back into the 22 and nothing has happened since, when it goes back to where it was kicked.

FREE PASS

Opponents **10 metres** back, and they cannot move forward until the ball leaves the passer's hands. On "Play" it is passed backwards through the air, and **nobody runs until the pass is made**.

QUICK THROW

The other team may take a **quick throw-in** instead — same ball, touched by nobody but a player.



CONTACT AND DISCIPLINE

HAND-OFFS, THE TACKLE & THE SIN BIN

THE HAND-OFF — CARRIED ON FROM U12

THE HAND-OFF — WORLD RUGBY, LAWS OF THE GAME

"A permitted action, taken by a ball-carrier to fend off an opponent, using the palm of the hand."

LEGAL AT U13

- ✓ An open palm, **below the armpits** of the opponent
- ✓ Used by the **ball carrier** only
- ✓ Without excessive force (World Rugby Law 9)

NOT LEGAL

- ✗ A hand-off or fend **above the armpits** — to the shoulders, neck or face
- ✗ A punch, a forearm or a swinging arm — that is foul play

THE TACKLE — THE SAME SAFETY RULES

THE TACKLER

Must use their **arms**, and grip and hold the ball carrier **below the base of the sternum** — the tummy or below. Anything higher is a **high tackle**.

THE BALL CARRIER

Must not go into contact with their **shoulders below their hips, dip down late and low**, or put their **head into the opponent's head space**.

After a tackle, supporting players may pick up or rip the ball and **run or pass**, and rucks and mauls have **no limit on numbers** — both as at U12.

THE SIN BIN

For the first time, a referee can **temporarily suspend** a player. The RFU's Under 13s rule is short: the time in the sin bin is **5 minutes**. In adult rugby a yellow card is 10 minutes (World Rugby Law 9).

Until now, referees sorted out problems with the coaches and the sides stayed equal. RugbyReferee.net's 2026/27 sheet reminds referees to **manage** the sin bin carefully at this age.

IF IT IS YOUR CHILD

Being sent to the sin bin is part of learning the game's discipline, and it is over in five minutes. Stay calm, let the coach talk to them, and talk it through together at home afterwards.

This is advice, not a rule.



FOR VOLUNTEER REFEREES — AND CURIOUS PARENTS

REFEREEING OPEN PLAY AT U13

This routine covers the new things to watch in open play. The routine is practical advice; the rules it enforces are the RFU's.

- 1 PITCH AND NUMBERS.** Up to 13 a side, on a pitch up to 90 × 60 metres. Rolling substitutions only when the ball is dead, with your permission.
- 2 TEN METRES.** At kick-offs, free kicks and free passes. Call it loudly and keep defenders retreating even if the kick is taken quickly.
- 3 LOOSE BALL.** A fly-hack is fine. A kick at the ball in a player's hands, or at a player, is not.
- 4 HAND-OFFS.** Open palm, below the armpits. Watch for arms that ride up to the neck or face.
- 5 THE TACKLE.** Arms used, below the base of the sternum. Ball carriers keep their shoulders above their hips and their head out of the opponent's head space.
- 6 KICKS.** No box kicks or drop goals. Players in front of the kicker retire 10 metres from where the ball lands.
- 7 DISCIPLINE.** Talk first. The sin bin is 5 minutes, for when talking has not worked or the offence needs it.

A FREE KICK IS AWARDED FOR

- Foul play
- Offside
- Squeezeball
- A tackle above the base of the sternum
- Falling on or over players on the ground with the ball
- Stopping a player on the ground passing the ball
- Pushing illegally in the scrum (RugbyReferee.net)
- Opponents go **10 metres** back, towards their own goal line

ADVANTAGE

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

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.



YOUR PART IN IT

HELPING YOUR CHILD

AT HOME

Coaching advice — keep contact for training.

- **Pick up, don't hack.** Roll a ball away and practise scooping it up on the run. Hacking is the back-up plan.
- **Practise the strong carry.** Ball in both hands, head up, shoulders above the hips. Walk it, then jog it.
- **Leave hand-offs and tackling to the coaches.** Contact belongs at training, with proper supervision.
- **Talk about the game.** Ask what the referee called, and why — especially after a free kick or the sin bin.

ON THE TOUCHLINE

- **Don't shout "Hand him off!"** or "Kick it!". Let the coaches coach.
- **Respect the referee.** It is very often a volunteer — and at U13 they now have the sin bin to manage too.
- **Never react to a card.** The player, the referee and the other team all deserve calm touchlines.
- **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 and definitions 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 6.

THE RULES

U13 RULES

[RFU — Under 13s Rules of Play \(Reg. 15, Appendix 7\)](#)

[englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby/regulation-15-appendix-7-u13-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](#)

EVERY AGE GRADE

[RugbyReferee.net — England age grade regulations 2026/27](#)

[rugbyreferee.net/refereeing-junior-rugby/england-rugby-age-grade-regulations-2026-27](#)

THE LAWS

FOUL PLAY & CARDS

[World Rugby — Law 9: Foul play](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/9-foul-play](#)

RESTARTS

[World Rugby — Law 12: Kick-off and restart kicks](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/12-kick-off-and-restart-kicks](#)

FREE KICKS

[World Rugby — Law 20: Penalty and free-kick](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/20-penalty-and-free-kick](#)

DEFINITIONS

[World Rugby — Definitions \(hand-off, fly-hack...\)](#)

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

SAFE TECHNIQUE

TACKLING

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

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

INJURY PREVENTION

[RFU — Activate injury prevention programme](#)

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

REFEREEING

JUNIOR RUGBY

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

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

LOCALLY

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

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

LAST SEASON

[RFU — Under 12s Rules of Play \(Reg. 15, Appendix 6\)](#)

[englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby/regulation-15-appendix-6-u12-rules-of-play](#)

ON ONE PAGE

[RugbyReferee.net — U13 regulations, season 2026/27 \(PDF\)](#)

[rugbyreferee.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/2026-27-u13s-RRNet-RFU-Regulations.pdf](#)

OFFSIDE

[World Rugby — Law 10: Offside and onside in open play](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/10-offside-and-onside-in-open-play](#)

THE TACKLE

[World Rugby — Law 14: Tackle](#)

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

IN-GOAL

[World Rugby — Law 21: In-goal](#)

[passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/21-in-goal](#)

EVERY LAW

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

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

TACKLE STAGES

[World Rugby — Tackle Ready](#)

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

REFEREE COURSE

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

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