



UNDER 16S TO UNDER 18S · THE FULL GAME

THE CONTESTED LINEOUT

A guide for U16, U17 and U18 (Colts) parents — what changes when both teams compete in the air, how players are kept safe, and what the referee penalises.

CREATED 15 SEPTEMBER 2026

From U16 the lineout becomes a real contest. **Both teams may jump, lift and support**, and the ball belongs to whoever wins it. It is the last big step in the RFU's lineout progression, and it arrives alongside longer matches and a longer sin bin. This guide explains what your child is now doing in the air, in plain English.

WHERE THE RULES IN THIS GUIDE COME FROM

U16 to U18 rugby in England is played to the **World Rugby Laws of the Game, including the World Rugby Under 19 variations**, plus the RFU's changes in **RFU Regulation 15, Appendix 9 — U15–U18 Variations to the Laws**. That page reads “Effective from Friday 1st August 2025”; the RFU's 2026/27 Regulation 15 did not republish it, so it is still the current version. Where a detail comes from RugbyReferee.net's 2026/27 summary sheet or the RFU's lineout FAQ, we say so. If anything here disagrees with the RFU, **the RFU is right**. Where we give coaching advice rather than a rule, we say so. Links are at the back.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT FROM U15

1 THE CONTEST

The lineout is **fully contested**, with lifting and supporting permitted for **both** sides. The throwing team no longer has to be given the ball — see pages 2 and 3.

2 LONGER MATCHES

35 minutes each half — 70 minutes, with no extra time (World Rugby Under 19 variation). The match ends if the points difference goes past 50.

3 LONGER SIN BIN

A yellow card means **7 minutes** off the field at U16, U17 and U18, up from 6 at U15 (Appendix 9).

4 SCRUM HALF AT THE SCRUM

The scrum half not throwing in **must stay at the tunnel** and cannot follow the ball round — a World Rugby Global Law Trial for all rugby. See page 4.

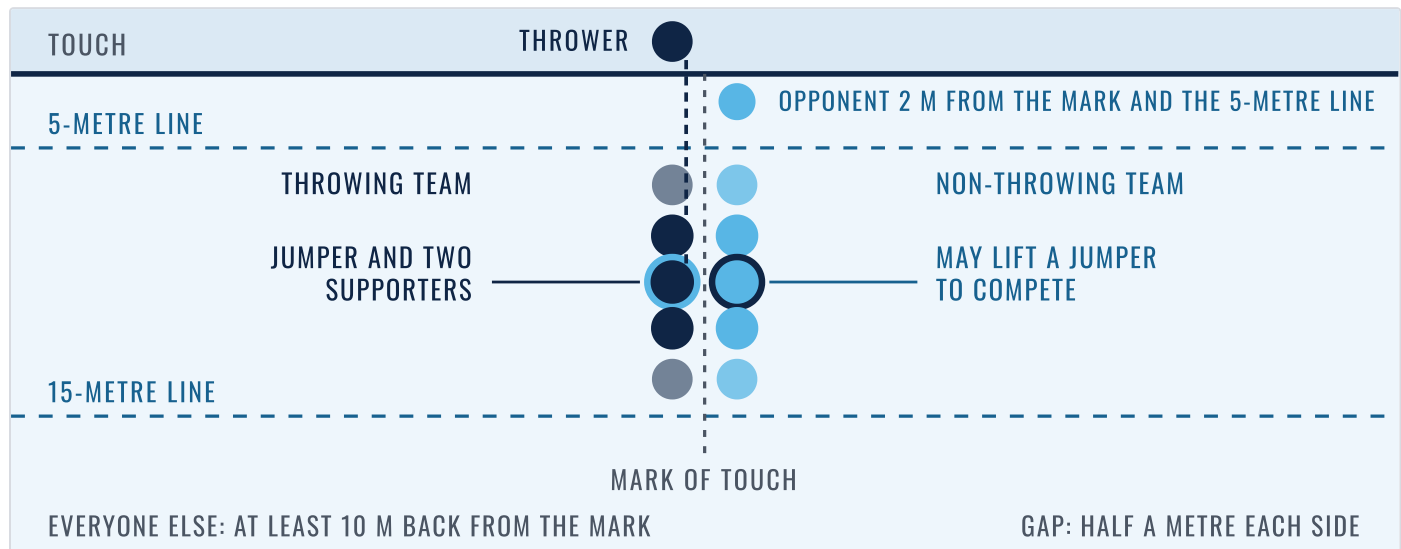
WHY THE LINEOUT WAS BUILT UP STEP BY STEP

The RFU introduces the lineout in stages: **uncontested with no lift at U14**, **uncontested with lifting at U15 (boys)**, and **contested from U16**. It warns that going straight to a contested lineout without those steps would be a big jump. Girls' age bands go from U14 straight to U16, so the RFU encourages girls' teams to **bring in the lift first** at the start of the U16 season, and the full contest once players are confident and competent.

THE RULES · WORLD RUGBY LAW 18

HOW THE CONTESTED LINEOUT WORKS

Two lines of players stand side by side and the ball is thrown straight down the gap between them. The throwing team knows where it is going — they call a code — but now the other team may jump for it too.



Seen from above. Each team forms a single line half a metre from the mark of touch, between the 5-metre and 15-metre lines (Law 18.10). The non-throwing team must have a player near the touchline (Law 18.15).

ONCE THE BALL IS THROWN, LINEOUT PLAYERS MAY

COMPETE	Jump for the ball , whichever team threw it in (Law 18.29a).
CATCH	Catch or deflect the ball. A jumper may catch or deflect it with the outside arm only if both hands are above their head . FREE KICK (Law 18.29b)
LIFT	Lift or support a team mate — and lower them safely as soon as the ball is won by either team . FREE KICK (Law 18.29c)
TACKLE	Grasp and bring down an opponent who has the ball — but not while that player is in the air , and not once a maul has formed. PENALTY (Law 18.29e)
STAY INSIDE	Stay on their own side of the mark of touch until the ball touches a player or the ground. A jumper who crosses and misses the ball must go straight back. PENALTY (Law 18.30–18.31)

NOT STRAIGHT?

Under a World Rugby Global Law Trial, if the other team **did not lift a jumper** to compete, **play on**. If they did, they choose a lineout or a scrum (Law 18.23a). RugbyReferee.net confirms this applies at U16–U18.

WHEN IT ENDS

The ball, or a player holding it, leaves the lineout, goes inside the 5-metre line or past the 15-metre line; a ruck or maul moves fully past the mark of touch; or the ball becomes unplayable (Law 18.38).

WORLD RUGBY · LAW 18 AND RUGBY READY

SAFETY IN THE AIR

In a contested lineout two jumpers may be lifted at the same moment, side by side, arms up for the same ball. Everything in the laws is there so that both come down on their feet.

THE RULES THAT KEEP JUMPERS SAFE

Lifters are responsible for their jumper. They must lower that player to the ground safely as soon as the ball is won by **either** team (Law 18.29c). No one may tackle or pull down a player who is in the air (Law 18.29e). World Rugby's Rugby Ready adds that players must never deliberately knock a jumper — or a lifter holding one — off balance.

BEFORE THE THROW

NO EARLY LIFT	No one may jump, be lifted or be supported before the ball leaves the thrower's hands. FREE KICK (Law 18.20)
WHERE TO GRIP	Lifters may take hold of a jumper before the throw, but not below the shorts from behind or below the thighs from the front. FREE KICK (Law 18.19)
KEEP THE GAP	The gap between the two lines must be kept until the ball is thrown in. FREE KICK (Law 18.10)
HANDS OFF	No contact with an opponent before the throw. PENALTY (Law 18.21)

WHO DOES WHAT IN THE LIFT

Key points from World Rugby's Rugby Ready: The lineout.

IN THE AIR

THE JUMPER

- ✓ Explode up from a **two-footed** take-off
- ✓ Hold a **long body shape** so the lifters keep control
- ✓ Watch the ball through the hands
- ✓ Talk to the lifters about coming down
- ✓ Land on **two feet**, knees bent

ON THE GROUND

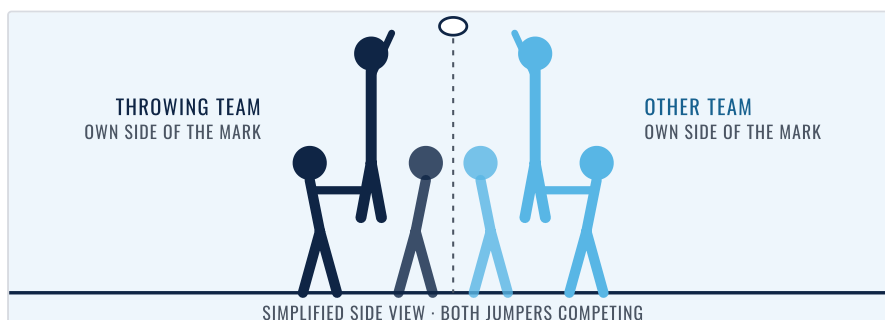
THE LIFTERS

- ✓ Wide, stable base; squat with a **flat back**
- ✓ Palms towards the jumper, fingers open
- ✓ Lift with **leg drive and locked arms**
- ✓ Bring the jumper down under control
- ✓ Never move to block the other team

THE REFEREE WATCHES FOR

FOUL PLAY

- ✗ Destabilising a player in the air
- ✗ Destabilising the lifters holding them
- ✗ Closing the gap between the lines
- ✗ Levering on, holding or shoving an opponent
- ✗ Jumpers abandoned in mid-air



COACHING ADVICE

Rugby Ready's coaching tips build lifting in progressions — lifting tackle bags and rucking pads first, using the legs rather than the back. **Lifting belongs at supervised training, never at home or in the park.**



WORLD RUGBY LAWS, UNDER 19 VARIATIONS AND THE RFU

THE REST OF THE U16–U18 GAME

By U16 very little is special to age grade rugby. The game is World Rugby's Laws with its Under 19 variations, plus a short list of RFU changes. Here is what else your child is playing to.

THE SCRUM

SCRUM HALVES	The scrum half throwing in may line up with their shoulder on the middle line (Law 19.15f). Once play begins, the other scrum half stays at the tunnel — both feet no further than its centre line — or retires; they cannot follow the ball round. PENALTY (Law 19.30, a Global Law Trial)
PUSHING	No more than 1.5 metres towards the other team's goal line, and the ball may not be kept in once it is heeled and controlled at the base. FREE KICK (Under 19 variation)
WHEELING	Reset if the scrum is wheeled unintentionally past 45 degrees . Wheeling on purpose is a penalty (Under 19 variation).
FRONT ROWS	Front-row and lock positions must be filled by suitably trained players . If they cannot be, the referee orders uncontested scrums (Under 19 variation). Eight-player scrums use a 3-4-1 formation.

TACKLE, BREAKDOWN AND KICKING

TACKLE HEIGHT	Below the base of the sternum — the tummy or below. Ball carriers must not go into contact with shoulders below hips, or dip late and low into an opponent's head space. PENALTY (Appendix 9)
SQUEEZE BALL	Banned, and no one may coach it. PENALTY (Appendix 9)
PROTECTING THE 9	A player in or from a ruck or maul may not play an opponent within 1 metre who is trying to play the ball away. PENALTY (Global Law Trial)
KICKING	Kicks at goal, box kicks and drop goals are all allowed. The 50:22 applies: kick from your own half so the ball bounces into touch in the opposition 22, and your team throws in (RugbyReferee.net; Law 18.8).
DROP-OUTS	Try-line drop-outs as in adult law when attackers take the ball into in-goal and do not score; 22 drop-outs after a missed kick at goal (Law 12.11–12.12).

MATCH DAY

MATCH LENGTH	70 minutes — two halves of 35 — plus time lost, with no extra time (Under 19 variation). The match ends if the points difference goes past 50 (RugbyReferee.net 2026/27).
SIN BIN	7 minutes at U16, U17 and U18 (Appendix 9).
SUBSTITUTES	Rolling and unlimited, only when the ball is dead and with the referee's permission (Appendix 9). The RFU's half game rule applies.
BALL AND PITCH	A size 5 ball on a full-size pitch (Appendix 9).



FOR VOLUNTEER REFEREES — AND CURIOUS PARENTS

REFEREEING THE CONTESTED LINEOUT

This routine works through a lineout in the order things happen. The routine is practical advice; the rules it enforces are World Rugby's Law 18.

- 1 FORM IT.** Two straight lines, half a metre either side of the mark, between the 5- and 15-metre lines. At least two per team; the throwing team sets the maximum and the other team may not have more. Formed within 30 seconds (Global Law Trial).
- 2 THE REST BACK.** Non-participants at least 10 metres from the mark of touch; the thrower's opponent 2 metres from the mark and the 5-metre line.
- 3 BEFORE THE THROW.** Gap kept, no contact with opponents, no early lift, and grips no lower than the shorts or thighs.
- 4 THE THROW.** Straight along the mark and at least 5 metres. Not straight with no lifted opponent competing; play on.
- 5 IN THE AIR.** Watch both pods. No one knocks a jumper or a lifter off balance, and nobody grabs a player who is in the air.
- 6 DOWN SAFELY.** Once either team wins the ball, both jumpers are lowered under control. Never leave a player stranded.
- 7 AFTER THE CATCH.** Offside line moves to the ball; watch the maul, the 15-metre line and non-participants coming forward.

FREE KICK FOR

- Jumping or lifting before the throw
- Gripping below the shorts or thighs
- Not lowering a jumper safely
- Closing the gap; blocking the throw
- Catching with the outside arm without both hands up

PENALTY FOR

- Contact with an opponent before the throw
- Grasping a player in the air
- Offside at the lineout
- Dangerous play against a jumper or lifter

LINEOUT OR SCRUM

- Not straight when the other team lifted to compete
- Throw not reaching 5 metres
- Thrower stepping into the field before throwing

WHEN EVERYTHING HAPPENS AT ONCE

Safety in the air comes first. A jumper who is being brought down dangerously matters more than any advantage. Rugby Ready's referee tips put checking that jumpers are supported and brought safely back to the ground at the top of the list.

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 lifting for training.

- **Never practise lifting at home.** Lifts are taught at training with progressions and supervision.
- **Practise the landing.** A two-footed jump and a soft, two-footed landing with bent knees is safe anywhere.
- **Practise throwing.** A straight throw to a target is the skill every lineout starts with.
- **Rest and recovery.** Longer matches bring more load — see the RFU's contact and match load guidance below.

ON THE TOUCHLINE

- **Praise the right things** — a controlled lift, a safe landing, lifters who bring their jumper down first.
- **Let the coaches coach.** Lineout calls are a code between players; shouted advice gets in the way.
- **Respect the referee.** A contested lineout is one of the hardest moments to referee.
- **Cheer effort** from both teams. Our values are the game's values: Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship.

Is your child a jumper or a lifter? World Rugby's Rugby Ready says all players should ideally be able to be jumpers and supporters, and may swap roles during the lineout.

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](https://englandrugby.com/play/parents-guardians/age-grade-rugby-overview)

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

CONCUSSION

[RFU — HEADCASE concussion information](https://englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/headcase)

englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/headcase

UK GUIDANCE

[UK Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport](https://sportandrecreation.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/concussion/concussion-guidelines-for-grassroots-sport)

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

BEHAVIOUR

[RFU — Code of conduct](https://englandrugby.com/play/parents-guardians/code-conduct)

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

FREE COURSE

[RFU — HEADCASE e-learning](https://englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/headcase-e-learning)

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

CONTACT & LOAD

[RFU — Age Grade contact training, match load and recovery](https://englandrugby.com/run/coaching/coach-resources/contact-guidance)

englandrugby.com/run/coaching/coach-resources/contact-guidance

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



SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

FIND OUT MORE

The variations come from the RFU; the laws 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 6.

THE RULES

U15–U18 RULES

[RFU — U15–U18 Variations to the Laws \(Reg. 15, Appendix 9\)](#)

englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby/regulation-15-appendix-9-u15-u18-variations-to-the-laws-of-the-game

ON ONE PAGE

[RugbyReferee.net — U16–U18 regulations, season 2026/27 \(PDF\)](#)

rugbyreferee.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/2026-27-u16-u18s-RRNet-RFU-Regulations.pdf

ALL AGE GRADES

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

englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby

LINEOUT FAQ

[RFU — The introduction of the lineout to age grade rugby \(PDF\)](#)

rugbyreferee.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Lineout-FAQs.pdf

THE LAWS

EVERY LAW

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

passport.world.rugby/media/jxrnmpk/2026en-laws-of-the-game-compressed.pdf

THE LINEOUT

[World Rugby — Law 18: Touch, quick throw and lineout](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/18-touch-quick-throw-and-lineout

UNDER 19S

[World Rugby — Under 19 law variations](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/variations-7s-10s-u19-game-on/under-19

U19 MATCH TIME

[World Rugby — Under 19 variation: Law 5 Time](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/variations-7s-10s-u19-game-on/under-19/5-time

U19 SCRUM

[World Rugby — Under 19 variation: Law 19 Scrum](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/variations-7s-10s-u19-game-on/under-19/19-scrum

THE SCRUM

[World Rugby — Law 19: Scrum](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/19-scrum

DROP-OUTS

[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

LAW TRIALS

[World Rugby — Global Law Trials \(1 January 2025\)](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/whats-new/2025-01-global-law-trials

LATEST CHANGES

[World Rugby — 2026-07 Law updates](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/whats-new/2026-07-law-updates

DEFINITIONS

[World Rugby — Definitions \(50:22, lineout...\)](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/definitions

SAFE TECHNIQUE

LIFTING

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

passport.world.rugby/injury-prevention-and-risk-management/rugby-ready/the-lineout

SCRUMMAGING

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

passport.world.rugby/injury-prevention-and-risk-management/rugby-ready/the-scrum

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

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