

Rucks

Definition of a ruck;

A ruck is formed when at least one player from each side is in physical contact, on their feet, competing for the ball which is on the ground. Simple! Well we know it's not that simple so let's break it down in detail.

Firstly as ever there is a major difference between a ruck in International/Premiership match and that at a Junior club match. Judgements made by referee's at these levels are completely different the ruck is probably the best (or worse) example of this difference (see below!).



In reality when a ruck is formed with several players coming in at speed judging what is acceptable can be extremely difficult.

It helps when there is a ruck, if the referee shouts out instructions "hands off its a ruck", "that's a ruck", "release the ball that's a ruck" are terms you might hear.

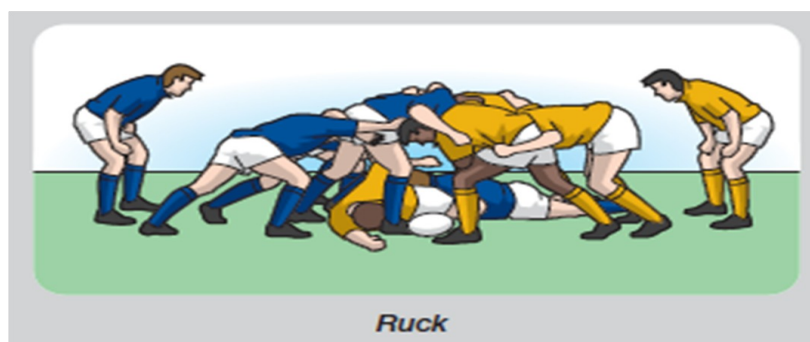
OK so lets take a situation step by step.

Gold team player gets tackled by a Blue Team player both hit the ground. Ref shouts "tackler release" and/or "release the ball".

Rules state the ball must be released 'immediately' by the tackled player. The tackler must also release the player he's

tackled and allow him to release the ball. So he can't try to scoop the ball back whilst he is still in effect in the tackle situation. What he can do is release the player, roll away, get on his feet and then pick up the ball (if no ruck is formed). So both players after releasing should make an effort to move away from the ball. In reality if the tackled player 'presents' the ball away from his body (good practice for several reasons), and stays on the ground for a few seconds, then this is fine. But if the tackled player leaves the ball close to his body, doesn't move and the ruck is closely fought the referee might deem he is preventing the opposition rucking the ball out fairly and he should move away.

So both players release, Gold tackled player is still on the ground when another blue player arrives, at this point he can step over the Gold player and pick up the ball as no ruck has been formed. But the Gold tackled player has presented the ball at arms length away from his body, which gives his team that extra split second to arrive and makes it harder for the opposition to get to it. Two Gold players arrive bind together hit (make contact) the Blue player (ref shouts "that's a ruck!") they compete and 'ruck' the ball back with there feet. A ruck was formed and completed, play on.



So what can go wrong?

We've explained the releasing of the ball and the player after the tackle. So arriving at the ruck when its been formed is very important.

Joining a Ruck.

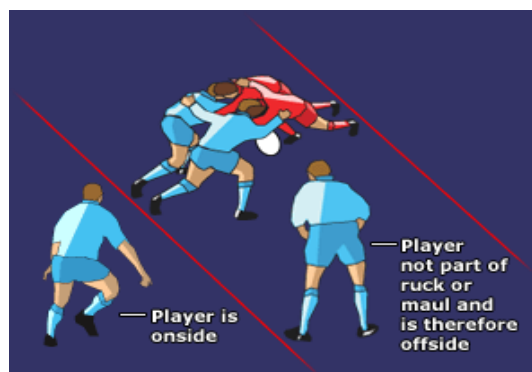
'stay on your feet' ...when coming into a ruck you must stay on your feet, if you go to ground you can seal the ball off not allowing the opposition to be able to ruck the ball back with their feet, quite frankly its potentially a dangerous situation and should be penalised. What I have seen many times is players arriving and either tripping over other players on the ground or even being pushed over by there own team mates, usually the result of poor rucking practice and if it interferes with the game will be penalised. If someone falls over accidentally has no effect on the game and no safety issues, i.e. immaterial then play on.

Now, if a ruck has formed correctly and the ball is coming out one side, and then the ruck goes to ground on the opposite side. This is just stronger rucking, play on.

You may have also heard the term **'enter through the gate'**, what's that then? This where you should enter a ruck. Imagine a player has been tackled and is lying on the ground parallel to the halfway line, he presents the ball straight back from his stomach, the distance from his shoulder to his knees is the 'gate'. To enter through this gate you must come from 'hindmost' foot i.e. the back foot of your team player at the back of the ruck.

If you had one player in the middle (over the ball) and two other players bound on either side of that player that's the area we are looking at.

See below if the blue player far left comes forward and sticks his head in between the two blue players in the ruck that's fine. If the blue player on the right runs directly forward and attaches himself onto the player on the right in the ruck that would be penalised as 'coming in from the side'.



“Coming in from the side” is one of the frequent shouts, if players stick to the practice above it wouldn't be a problem. Unfortunately they don't but to be fair to all we don't have lovely red lines showing us where the offside line is! Rucks can also go back and forward and what tends to happen is some players creep round the sides. Once again ref's will ask themselves is this material to the outcome if not play on, if they creep round the side and then interfere with the play then a ref will penalise. This is also where a player bound onto the ruck will 'guard' the sides of the ruck to stop this practice.

When joining a ruck you must **bind with the whole arm**, either onto a team mate or an opponent, running into a ruck and just using your shoulder is not allowed. Just placing your hand on someone is also classed as not binding properly and illegal, its also ineffective and bad practice.

“Hands in the ruck” ..this where the communication with the referee is vital. You know in law when a ruck is formed but what can happen is a player is attempting to pick up the ball, after a tackle situation, an opposing player tries to ruck

him off the ball i.e. a ruck has formed and he continues to use his hands. As soon as the ruck is formed the ref needs to shout "hands out that's a ruck!" If he continues to use his hands it's a penalty. Alternatively a player tries to use a sneaky hand to 'help' the ball back whilst the ruck is being competed this is also illegal, Penalty.

What's not in law, but allowed generally is where the scrum half, lovely little quiet chaps, bless 'em, they get some dispensation here. If the ball is clearly on one side but stuck the referee may let him "go in and get the ball". What we are after is to let the game go on and not penalise everything.

Other Offences, If you are not part of the ruck and in front of the back foot of your team (as the blue player is in the pic above) you are '**loitering**', Offside.

A player must not dive on the ball whilst still in the ruck. If the balls out and loose and you come from behind the back foot then that is ok.

Do not **drag an opposition player** out of a ruck.

If a the ball becomes unplayable in a ruck i.e. **an unsuccessful end to a ruck**, then the referee will blow his whistle and give a scum to the team who was going forward immediately before the ruck was formed.

I hope this helps it's not an easy area as you see and considering a ruck can be over in 10 seconds it can be hard to spot everything.

Any questions contact; enquiry@therugbyclubshop.com