A History of the Rules of Rugby Fives

(including the 2022 revision)

When George Bell & Sons published ‘Tennis, Rackets and Fives’ in their ‘All-England Series’ in 1890, the substantial section on Fives was entrusted to a schoolmaster who, in his own words, had ‘played the Rugby game eight years and the Eton game twelve pretty constantly’. His name was James Andrew Arnan Tait, a remarkable man who spent most of his teaching career at Charterhouse.

Although Eton Fives had benefitted by having its Laws established in 1877, the Rugby version of the game, although increasingly widely played, had only local regulations. One might possibly assume that the apparent simplicity of the court (and therefore the game to be played on it) needed little in the way of description or definition. This meant, however, that the ‘Rugby’ courts being constructed by schools were of different sizes, some with three walls, some with four, some covered, some not, and so on. There was even a court at Worcester College, Oxford, which had a small slanting buttress on the left-hand wall of the court, the precise originator of this design being unknown to this day.

This feature was adopted for two of its 1862 courts by Winchester, which had very close contacts with Oxford. Rugby also built one of their 1860 courts in this style, but Rugbeians didn’t take to the idea of the buttress, and the court was soon altered by filling in the offending projection. The other two 1862 Winchester courts had no buttress, but when more courts were built in 1882, they all had the feature.

When Arnan Tait needed a set of Laws for the Rugby Fives section of ‘Tennis, Rackets and Fives’ in 1890, he turned to Jack Toye, a master at Winchester and an expert at the game, who had already published a set in the pages of ‘The Wykehamist’ in 1885.

Tait wrote: “Permission to print the rules of the Rugby game I owe to the kindness of Mr A.J.Toye, in whom the copyright is vested. At most schools, where this form of the game obtains, the rules are merely an ‘unwritten law’, adapted from those of the racket court and handed down by tradition; but these, with certain unimportant alterations, have the *imprimatur* both of Winchester and Oxford, and the receipt of them relieved me from the troublesome and thankless task of drawing up a code for the first time on my own responsibility; wherefore my debt to Mr Toye is all the greater.”

This is why the first Laws – or Rules, as they came later to be called – of Rugby Fives to be published in a book about the game bore the heading:

Definitions and Laws of the Rugby Game as Played at Winchester

These 1890 Laws are shown below:

The 1890 Laws Based on the 1885 Laws Published by A.J.Toye

DEFINITIONS AND LAWS OF THE RUGBY GAME AS PLAYED AT WINCHESTER

The court is enclosed on four sides.
The *buttress* (if there be one) projects from the left-hand wall from 9 1/2 to 10 inches, at an angle of about 135º, and at a distance of 9 ft. 9 in. from the front wall. In height it is co-extensive with the wall, which is flush with it at both angles, so that it is impossible to hit over or behind the buttress as it has but one face.
The *line*, either simply painted on the wall, or better still set up in wood, runs across the front wall at a distance of 34 inches from the ground.

1. Each game shall consist of 14 points, or aces, and a game-ball; if both sides are at 13, the game may be set at 5, at the option of the out-side; or at 3 if both have reached 14, at the option of the out-side; provided that the in-side at the time of setting shall only take one hand the first innings after the setting, and also that no false return of the game-ball shall be allowed.
2. The first innings of the first game shall be by lot; but, afterwards the winner of the preceding game shall go in first.
3. The side going in first can only take one hand the first innings.
4. In serving, the server must stand by or near the buttress, the player who returns the service standing in a line with him; the out-playing partner of the server stands behind the returner, and the out-playing partner of the returner stands behind the server.
5. The ball must be served to the front and right walls in that order and returned on one of the side walls and then on the front wall above the line: but if a ball be falsely served it is at the option of the adversary to return it.
6. The player who has to return the ball may, under no circumstances, change places with his partner.
7. If a ball, after being struck by a player, touch his partner or himself, before one of his adversaries have touched it, and before it has bounded the second time, it counts as an ace or hand-out against him, as the case may be.
8. If a player strike at and miss a ball, his partner may play it, but he cannot claim a let if his adversary is in the way.
9. If a ball strike the roof or gallery of a covered court it is a hand-out.
10. Under no circumstances may kicking the ball be allowed.
11. In returning the game-ball, the third successive false return counts against the striker. Only on the first occasion of game-ball being served need game-ball be called.
12. Any service returned below the line counts against the striker.
13. The above rules apply to single as well as double fives.

Note to Rule 7. – The players shall be at liberty, before beginning to play, to agree that if the ball in returning from the wall hit the player or his partner it shall be a let instead of an ace or hand-out, but this shall only be allowed if the players are unanimous, and the marker is informed of it before the beginning of the game.

The above Laws are very slightly adapted from the original ones published in ‘The Wykehamist’ in 1885.

One must remember that Winchester in 1890 still had two ‘Rugby’ courts, as well as five with the buttress, so the proviso in line two (‘if there be one’) is understandable. No court dimensions are given except those concerning the buttress and the line, or bar.

As mentioned above, the non-Eton Fives courts built by schools in the forty year period between 1880 and 1920 varied tremendously in their dimensions. In many schools, the court or courts were built onto a wall in a corner of the playground and used for pure recreation. Even when the game began to be taken more seriously as a sport, the competitions were internal. The first inter-school fixtures in the 1880s and ’90s were often disappointing, in that they exposed the differences between courts. The home side was at a huge advantage. Some of the courts were cavernous, others had no back wall, some were fast, others slow, and quite a few had hazards in the court such as buttresses, door knobs or drainpipes. Many courts were roofless and therefore subject to the weather at all times. Playing on wet courts is no pleasure, and dampness is an enemy of walls and floors, which can deteriorate rapidly. When roofs with glass panes to let in some light were built, they tended to leak. Electric lighting, regarded as a luxury, was necessary for indoor courts, adding to the cost. These were some of the reasons which hindered the rapid development of the game.

The fact remains that many educational establishments were in possession of one or more Fives courts by the end of the first decade of the 20th century. Some of the wealthier and more prestigious schools had rows or blocks of courts and were already playing one another on a regular basis. ‘Rugby’ Fives had arrived, but there was still no governing body to ensure some degree of unanimity on court dimensions or play.

An initiative took place in 1907 by interested parties at Queen’s Club in London to create an Association as the central authority for the games of Tennis, Rackets, Squash Rackets and Fives. A representative meeting was held at Queen’s in April that year, and the result was the formation of the Tennis, Rackets and Fives Association.

A Handbook was compiled and published laying out the Rules governing the new Association and listing the President, Vice Presidents, Executive Committee and Members of the Association. School representatives on the Committee came from Malvern, Charterhouse and Winchester. Members of the Association included representatives from Radley, Wellington, Rugby, Harrow, Cheltenham, Eton, Haileybury and Marlborough. Oxford and Cambridge were also represented, along with MCC, Prince’s Club, Queen’s Club and a wide variety of Regional Clubs and owners of Private Courts.

The Handbook contained descriptions of the various games and their rules, with ten pages on Eton Fives and a mere two on the Rugby game. These two pages gave a clear account of the Rules of Rugby Fives and the dimensions of a Rugby Fives Court, dated 1909. No identification of author is made, but it may have been one of the Executive Committee, either EB Noel or Eustace Miles, who both wrote published articles about Fives. It is also quite possible that the Executive Committee simply reproduced the Rules in use at Rugby School at the time.

The 1909 Rules

RUGBY FIVES

RULES OF THE GAME

ISSUED BY THE
TENNIS, RACKETS AND FIVES ASSOCIATION

1909

1. In the first game the first innings shall be by lot. Afterwards the winner of the preceding game shall go in first.
2. In the first innings of the first game the side going in first shall only take one hand.
3. The ball must be served to the front and right wall. it *should* be returned to the right wall and then the front wall. If the ball hits the front wall first, the server or his partner have the option of leaving or taking it; if it is left the stroke does not count against the striker; if it is taken, the ball is in play (for a left-handed player read 'left' for 'right').
4. The striker is not bound to accept a service which is not to his liking.
5. Aces are scored by the server's side only.
6. The server scores an ace
   (a) if the striker return the service on or below the board or out of court (except at game ball, when the game must be won from a rally);
   (b) if an opponent during a rally strike the ball onto or below the board, or out of court;
   (c) if the ball, after being struck by an opponent, touch himself or his partner before it has bounced.
7. The server is put out if either he or his partner
   (a) during a rally strike the ball on to or below the board, or send it out of court;
   (b) having struck the ball, is touched by it before it has bounced.
8. No player may take a ball after it has once hit him or his partner.
9. If a player strike at and miss a ball his partner may take it; but the partner may not claim a 'let'.
10. No ball shall be considered up unless hit with the hand or part of the arm below the elbow.
11. A ball that strikes the bevelled edge of the wall facing or (where there is no back wall) the edge of the floor, is out of court.
12. The game is 15 up. At '13 all' the striker has the option of setting to 5; at '14 all' he has the option of setting to 3.
13. A 'let' is given
   (d) when the ball touches an opponent after the first bounce, provided neither the claimant nor his partner have attempted to take the ball;
   (e) if the striker is actually prevented by an opponent from seeing, reaching or striking at the ball;
   (f) if an opponent unintentionally impedes a ball that would otherwise have been up.
14. In match play an Umpire should be appointed. The Umpire's decisions are final.

DIMENSIONS OF A RUGBY FIVES COURT.

Length inside … …	29 ft.
Breadth … … …	19 ft. 4 in.
Height (playing wall)	16 ft. 9 in.
Playing board … …	2ft. 6 in.
End wall … … …	5 ft. to edge of coping.
Fall … … … …	7 1/2 in. in total length.

If dimensions are unsuitable on account of space or material the ratio 2 : 3 for breadth to length should be retained.

This was the first time the dimensions of a Rugby Fives court had been officially published by a body representing the game as a whole. It was to be 21 more years before the Rugby Fives Association put its name to a set of Rules of Rugby Fives. Approved RFA court dimensions were published in 1931, after a large number of schools had been consulted.

The 1909 dimensions show that the old courts were slightly longer and wider than the modern ones, although the board or bar was at the same height as today.
The 'fall' is literally a slope from front to back. The old open Rugby School courts were equipped with a drain at the back for the rain to flow into. The present Giggleswick courts have this feature despite having a roof.

The 1914-18 War brought massive changes to society, and sport was no exception. Fives continued to be played in schools during the War, but on a restricted basis, and adult players of Fives were likely to be otherwise occupied.

The 1920s saw another effort to bring the various court games together under one banner. Again it seemed to be centred on Queen's Club, whence the previous initiative had come in 1907. Circumstantial evidence points to the Secretary of the Club, EB Noel, as being one of the principal movers in this new project. Evan Noel had been on the Executive Committee of the short-lived Tennis, Rackets and Fives Association which formulated the Rules of Rugby Fives in 1909, and when The Times announced on November 7th 1923 that 'A Fives Association has been formed with a view to popularising the game, and in order to arrange inter-club fixtures', he was among those on the new Committee.

The next mention of the Fives Association in The Times appeared almost a year later on October 24th 1924. By this time, Noel was described as 'temporary acting secretary', but two weeks later he stepped down. A lengthy Times article of November 8th 1924 headed 'Committee Meeting at Queen's' paid the following tribute to him: 'It is impossible to write what immeasurable force he has lent to the propagation of the game of Fives by his work, his suggestions, and his personality. Without his gentle persuasion and occasional firmness Fives could not be in the happy position which it now occupies.'

That same article lists the names of the Committee of the Fives Association, among them representatives from Rugby, Marlborough, Winchester, St Paul's, the Old Paulines, the Clove Club and University College School. The last-named school's representative was also vice-chairman of the Committee: this was Dr Edgar Cyriax, a powerful personality who was to play a major part in the history of Rugby Fives.

More from The Times article in November 1924: ‘The Rugby Fives Clubs seem very well together, and Dr Cyriax collected his committee directly after the meeting. Rugby Fives is played, in England, by a comparatively small number of clubs, but Dr Cyriax, who was, perhaps, the greatest player of this game in the last 70 years – beyond that one can only go by hearsay – has Rugby Fives very much under control and in being.’

In December 1924, The Times announced that Dr Cyriax had presented a cup for Rugby Fives pairs to play for. Entries were to be sent to the new Honorary Secretary of the Fives Association. 24 pairs entered, but, owing to a certain lack of direction – pairs were expected to organise their own matches – it was late 1926 before the competition was concluded. By that time, Dr Cyriax and his group of London-based enthusiasts had already met informally several times to discuss forming their own Association. This led to the founding of the Rugby Fives Association in 1927.

The first Honorary Secretary of the RFA, Victor Bowley, wrote in October 1934 of the standardisation of the Rules of Rugby Fives brought about by the RFA in 1930. ‘A small sub-committee was appointed to draw up a preliminary code of Rules, a copy of which was sent to all known Rugby Fives Schools and Clubs together with an invitation to send criticisms and suggestions. All such were carefully analysed and tabulated before the final draft was made. The most difficult part of the task was the formation of a Rule that should adequately deal with the thorny question of ‘lets’. Most rules were subjected to some form of criticism. The only one that met with unanimous approval was the last, to wit, that the umpire’s decision should be final. The final draft was ratified by an Extraordinary General Meeting on May 8th 1930.’

These 1930 Rules are on the next two pages.

The 1930 Rules

RULES OF RUGBY FIVES

(As approved by the Rugby Fives Association)

DEFINITIONS

The game is played in a court enclosed by four walls. The 'front' wall is distinguished by a board of wood running across it at an even height from the ground.

The wall opposite the front wall is the 'back' wall, and the two adjoining walls, as the players stand facing the front wall, are respectively the 'right' side wall and the 'left' side wall.

The game may be played between two or four players, i.e. as Singles, or Doubles.

The throwing up of the ball into play is known as the 'service', and the player who hits the ball thus thrown is known as the 'striker' (who is said to be 'out' or 'down'), his opponent being known as the 'server' (who is said to be 'in' or 'up').

RULES OF THE SINGLES GAME

1. At the commencement of a game a preliminary rally shall be played. The winner of this becomes the server, and the loser, striker.

2. SERVICE. The server must 'serve' the ball by throwing it up so that it strikes the front wall first, above the board, and then one of the side walls, in such a manner as the striker may require. If the striker so desire, he may throw the ball up for himself.

3. The striker may not return a service that does not conform to Rule 2.

4. RETURN OF SERVICE. The striker must return the ball, after the first bounce and before the second, so that the ball strikes first the side wall against which the service has been thrown and then the front wall.

5. After the service and its return the opponents shall alternately hit the ball, before the second bounce, on to the front wall above the board, either directly or after it has hit the side and/or back walls. No second attempt to hit a ball may be made after it has once been touched.

6. BLACKGUARD. Should the return of service hit the front wall, either first or after previously hitting the opposite side wall (such a return being known as a 'blackguard'), the server may take it as if it had been correctly returned, provided he calls out 'Taken' before hitting the ball. Such decision having been once given cannot be revoked.

The striker may not intentionally stop a blackguard. (See Rule 8*b*.)

When the server requires one point to win the game he may not take a blackguard.

7. SCORING. The player who first scores 15 points (except as provided when the score reaches game-ball-all) wins the game.

Only the server can score points. When the server wins a rally, he scores one point. When the striker wins a rally, he becomes server.

Should each player score 14 points, the first player to score 2 points wins the game.

8. A rally is won by a player if—

(*a*) his opponent fails to hit the ball (except as provided under 9*d*), or hits it after the second bounce, or hits it on to or below the board, or against the roof, or otherwise out of the confines of the court, or on to the floor before hitting the front wall.

Note (1). When the server requires one point to win the game, the striker is not penalized if he returns the service not more than twice consecutively on to or below the board, or against the roof, or otherwise outside the confines of the court.

Note (2). Should a player strike his opponent with a ball which would not have gone 'up' (i.e. been correctly returned to the front wall), he nevertheless loses the rally.

(*b*) his opponent, being striker, returns more than two consecutive untaken blackguards, or intentionally stops a blackguard.

(*c*) he causes the ball, after it has hit the front wall, to strike his opponent before it has bounced, other than in the case provided for under 9c.

(*d*) if his opponent causes the ball, after it has hit the front wall, to strike himself before it has bounced. This also applies to blackguards.

(*e*) his opponent hits the ball otherwise than with the hand or forearm.

9. LETS. A let is allowed, and the rally shall not count if—

(*a*) a player strikes his opponent with a ball which would have gone 'up'.

(*b*) a player causes the ball, after it has hit the front wall, to strike himself after it has bounced.

(*c*) a player is prevented by his opponent from correctly returning the ball. Should a player, though impeded, hit the ball so that it go 'up', he may claim a let at once: otherwise the rally shall continue.

(*d*) the striker, when about to return the service, fails to hit the ball, or changes his mind and calls out 'No' before hitting the ball, even if it accidentally go 'up'.

10. The umpire's decision is final.

RULES OF THE DOUBLES GAME

The Rules of the Singles Game shall apply to the Doubles Game, and wherever the words 'server', 'striker', 'opponent', or 'player' are used in the Rules of the Singles Game, such words shall, wherever possible, be taken to include his partner in the Doubles Game.

1. All four players shall take part in the preliminary rally.

2. The server and his partner are known as 'hands'. The side winning the preliminary rally shall have only one hand.

3. The server remains 'in' until his side loses a rally, whereupon his partner shall serve (except as provided for in Rule 2). When his side loses another rally, his opponents become servers.

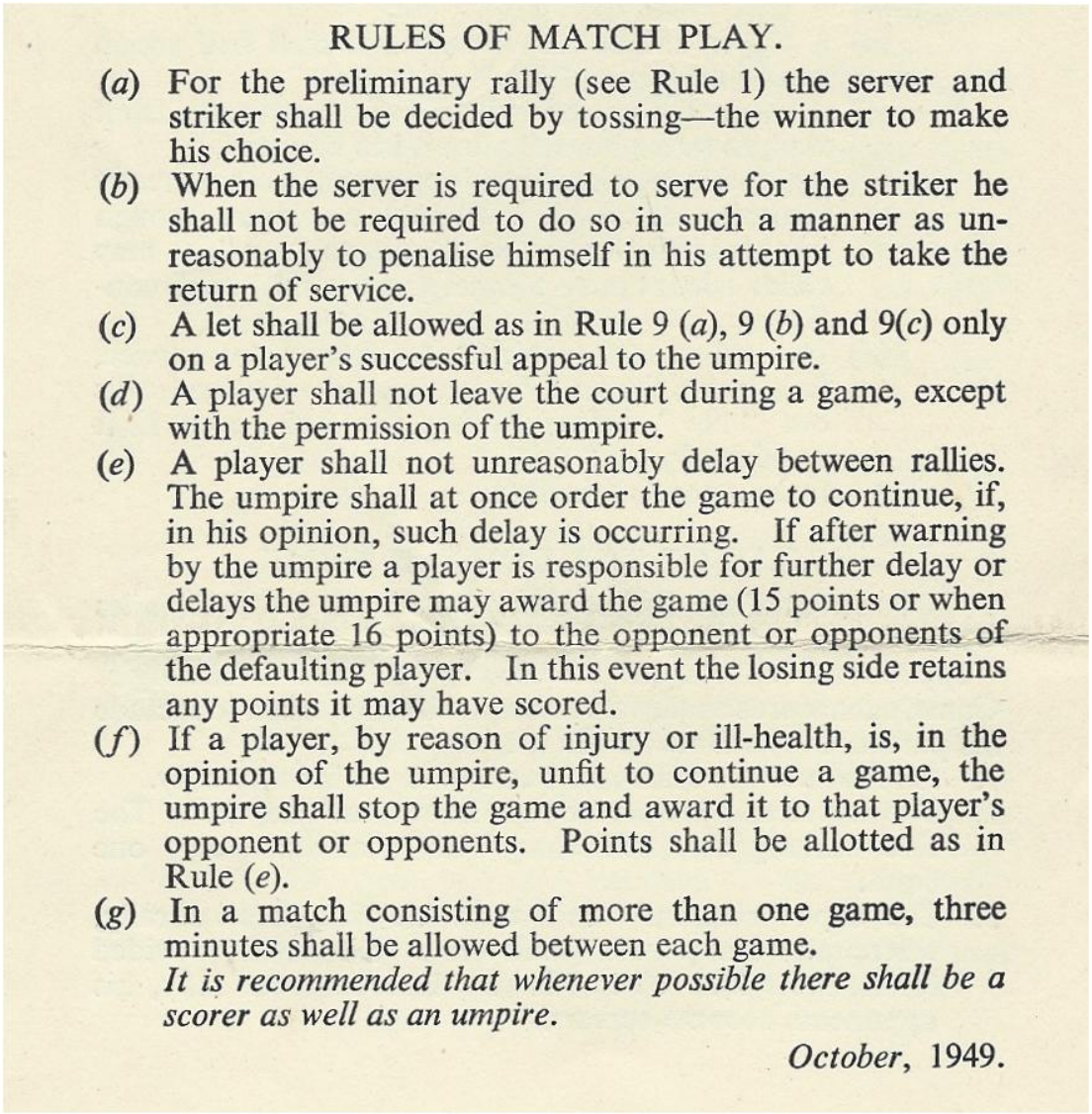
4. The side that is 'down' must change strikers after every point scored by their opponents.

5. If the wrong player serves or strikes, the mistake must be pointed out before the end of the rally, otherwise the rally counts; but at the next 'hand', the pairs shall revert to their correct order.

6. Only the server may take the return of service, but either he or his partner may elect to take a blackguard.

Although the 1930 Rules of Rugby Fives were not universally adopted, they proved to be durable for those who applied them. Local custom still lasted into the 1950s or even 1960s in some more remote or traditionally-minded schools, and the schools which had Winchester Fives courts or courts with unusual hazards needed local rules to accommodate them, as they still do.

A major addition to the Rules was made in 1949 according to the recommendations of a sub-committee considering match play.



RULES OF MATCH PLAY.

(*a*) For the preliminary rally (see Rule 1) the server and striker shall be decided by tossing—the winner to make his choice.

(*b*) When the server is required to serve for the striker he shall not be required to do so in such a manner as unreasonably to penalise himself in his attempt to take the return of service.

(*c*) A let shall be allowed as in Rule 9 (*a*), 9 (*b*) and 9(*c*) only on a player's successful appeal to the umpire.

(*d*) A player shall not leave the court during a game, except with the permission of the umpire.

(*e*) A player shall not unreasonably delay between rallies. The umpire shall at once order the game to continue, if, in his opinion, such delay is occurring. If after warning by the umpire a player is responsible for further delay or delays the umpire may award the game (15 points or when appropriate 16 points) to the opponent or opponents of the defaulting player. In this event the losing side retains any points it may have scored.

(*f*) If a player, by reason of injury or ill-health, is, in the opinion of the umpire, unfit to continue a game, the umpire shall stop the game and award it to that player's opponent or opponents. Points shall be allotted as in Rule (*e*).

(*g*) In a match consisting of more than one game, three minutes shall be allowed between each game.

It is recommended that whenever possible there shall be a scorer as well as an umpire.

October, 1949.

The Rules of Match Play were extended in 1955 to cover the procedure for starting the second and each subsequent game of a match, the winner of the previous game 'continuing to serve'. The word 'serve' was amended to 'receive' in 1959, as by that stage the old custom of the 'server' throwing the ball up for the 'striker' to hit had been largely abandoned. The quality of the balls was becoming unreliable at this time, and therefore a new clause was added, stating that a new ball was to be taken at the beginning of each game in a match unless otherwise agreed between the players, while a defective ball could be changed at any time if the umpire agreed.

Umpires, markers, scorers and let-judges

Fives is largely policed by the players themselves, of whatever age. It remains an amateur sport, and there are no penalty points. ‘Lets’ are decided by the players on court, not an easy thing for schoolchildren to do, but an opportunity to learn sportsmanship. So the etiquette of the game is important, emphasising self-control and fair-play. The score is kept (sometimes too quietly!) by the players. Of course this means that in a school match, for example, things can get out of hand and need a touch of control from authority. But this is true of school life generally!

In final recognition of this, the 2022 Rules have abolished the hallowed line in paragraph 7 which stated: ’The Referee’s decision is final’, and substituted the following: ‘By tradition, Rugby Fives is self-refereed; however, in the case of an unresolved or unresolvable dispute, an appropriate responsible adult outside the court, such as the tournament organiser or coach, shall be the final arbiter’.

What happens in practice is that if there is any doubt about the fairness of a shot, a ‘let’ is played. If the problem is one of behaviour (leaving the court without reason, too many drinks breaks, too long between games) the tournament organiser becomes the decider – he or she is the referee, in that sense. There is of course still a risk in the case of young inexperienced players who do not fully know the rules, or of more experienced players who take advantage of their opponent’s lack of knowledge of the rules. There are even cases where both young players are unaware of the rules and have to be corrected by more experienced players or spectators in the gallery. Is this a bad thing? I doubt it. To insist on a referee or umpire being present for every court at every match would be to take a sledge-hammer to crack a nut – but if the game were a professional one, this would have to happen, and it would change the nature of the game.

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Since 1959, there have been four further editions of the Rules: in 1972, 1995, 2010 and 2022. Economy and clarity of language has been the aim, but the essence of the 1930 original remains. Strikers have become servers and servers receivers; the taking of a new ball for every game is unnecessary (as well as expensive); but the game itself is the same in the generous spirit in which it is played. The ball is faster now, enabling cross-court slams as well as delicate drop-shots – the latter an even tougher shot than it used to be! – but the rallies can go on as long as they used to, or even longer. And the new glass-backed courts provide spectators with a better view of the game than ever.

Two pages of the 2022 Rules follow. A recent important change is that new Rules, and a new ball, have been developed for play on a Squash court.

David Barnes October 2026

The 2022 Rules

Rules of Rugby Fives

(approved by the Rugby Fives Association)

DEFINITIONS

The game is played in a court enclosed by four walls such as a Rugby Fives or Squash court. The 'front' wall has a board or ‘tin’ running across it at an even height from the floor. The Rugby Fives ball has been specifically developed for use on the concrete floors of Rugby Fives courts. A Squash Court Fives ball is available which allows Rugby Fives to be played on a Squash court - it adjusts the bounce to account for the larger court, the cushioned wooden floor and the lower tin.

The game may be played between two or four players, i.e. as Singles or Doubles.

SERVER and RECEIVER. The player first hitting the ball is the 'server' the opponent being known as the 'receiver'.

'UP'. The ball is said to be 'up' when it is hit before the second bounce on the floor, strikes the front wall above the board, and does not leave the confines of the playing surface. Painted lines marking the upper limit of any wall are not part of the playing surface.

RULES OF THE SINGLES GAME

1. PRELIMINARY RALLY.
Before the start of a game, a preliminary rally shall be played. The 'winner' of this becomes the receiver.
2. SERVICE.
(a) At the start of a rally the server throws the ball up so that it first strikes the front wall above the board and then one of the side walls, before bouncing. There is no penalty for doing this incorrectly, but the service cannot be completed unless the ball has been thrown up in this way.
(b) After throwing the ball up correctly and allowing it to bounce, the server shall hit it before the second bounce on the floor, so that it strikes first the side wall against which it has been thrown and then the front wall above the board.
(c) The serve may take place on either side of the court. The server must notify the receiver before changing side.
3. BLACKGUARD. A service which, after striking the ball, hits the front wall above the board without having first touched the side wall is called a 'blackguard'. The receiver may return a blackguard but must indicate an intention to do so by calling ‘Yes’ before striking the ball. This call shall be irrevocable as shall any call indicating intention not to take a blackguard. When the receiver requires one point to win the game, a blackguard may not be taken.
On a squash court, the server has an obligation to serve such that the ball would land on its second bounce either beyond the half court line or beyond the short line (see illustration). In the event that the serve is 'short', then it is deemed to be a blackguard. Clearly, the half court line does not extend into the front of the court and so a judgement must be made and if there is disagreement as to whether it crossed the line then the serve shall be retaken with no penalty.
4. RALLIES. After the service, the opponents shall alternately hit the ball before the second bounce on the floor onto the front wall above the board or tin, either directly or after it has hit the side and/or back walls. No second attempt may be made to hit a ball after it has once been touched. A rally is won by a player, unless a 'let' is allowed under Rule 6:
(a) if the opponent fails to hit the ball 'up', as defined.
(b) if the opponent, being server, serves three consecutive untaken blackguards, or stops a blackguard before it has bounced, or intentionally stops a blackguard after it has bounced on the floor.
(c) if the opponent causes the ball, after it has hit the front wall, to strike himself/herself before it has bounced.
(d) if the opponent hits the ball otherwise than with the hand or forearm.

5. SCORING. Only the receiver can score points. When the receiver wins a rally he/she scores a point. When the server wins a rally he/she becomes receiver for the next rally. The player who first scores 15 points (except as provided when the score reaches 14-14) wins the game. Should each player score 14 points, the first player to reach 16 wins the game.
Games in a championship, tournament or match may by agreement be played up to 11 points. In this case, if the score reaches 10 all, the first player to reach 12 wins the game. When the receiver requires one point to win the game, the server is allowed two consecutive incorrect serves (including blackguards) without penalty. The third service must be valid or the server loses the point and game.

6. LETS.
Players have a duty to avoid obstructing opponents in making their shots, and not to obstruct the flight of the ball.
A let is allowed and the rally shall not count:
(a) if a player strikes an opponent with a ball which would have gone up.
(b) if a player causes the ball, after it has hit the front wall, to strike himself/herself after it has bounced.
(c) if a player is prevented by an opponent from correctly returning the ball (e.g. through physical or visual obstruction).
Should a player, though impeded, hit the ball so that it goes up, the player may claim a let at once; otherwise the rally shall continue.
(d) if the server, when about to serve, fails to hit the ball, or decides not to continue serving and calls out 'no' before hitting the ball, even if it accidentally goes up.
(e) if the ball is hit 'up' in such a way that it bounces and then goes out of the playing area.
(f) if it is determined that an occurrence on or off the court distracts either player.
(g) if a player fails to call a warning before turning and striking the ball.

7. REFEREES.
By tradition, Rugby Fives is self-refereed, however, in the case of an unresolved or unresolvable dispute then an appropriate responsible adult outside the court, such as the tournament organiser or coach, shall be the final arbiter.

RULES OF THE DOUBLES GAME

The Rules of the Singles Game shall apply to the Doubles Game, and wherever the words 'server', 'receiver', ‘opponent' or 'player' are used in the Rules of the Singles Game, such words shall, whenever possible, be taken to include their partners in the Doubles Game. Thus, if the duration of the rally requires their participation, all four players shall take part.
1. The receiver (normally called 'first hand') remains as the receiver until the receiver and his/her partner lose a rally, whereupon the partner (normally called 'second hand') receives. When they lose another rally, ‘change’ is declared and the partner (second hand) will serve to the opponent who has just been the server.
2. At the beginning of a game, the side winning the preliminary rally may choose whether to serve or receive, and the side receiving starts at 'second hand'.
3. The side that is serving must alternate server after every point scored by their opponents.
4. If the wrong player serves or receives, the rally counts unless the mistake is pointed out before the start of the next rally.
5. Only the receiver may return the service; the receiver or receiver’s partner may elect to take a blackguard. If either of them says 'yes' to a blackguard, the rally commences.

RULES OF MATCH PLAY

(a) For the preliminary rally (see Rule 1 of the Rules of the Singles Game) the receiver and server shall be decided by a short contest of chance or skill, most usually by hiding the ball behind the back and having the other side guess which hand it is in - the winner chooses to receive or serve.
(b) A preliminary rally shall not be played at the beginning of any subsequent game of a match, and the winner of the previous game shall continue to receive. In Doubles the winners shall start on second hand.
(c) A true and consistent ball (new or used), agreed by all players, should be taken to start a match. A defective ball may be replaced at any time if, in the opinion of the players, a change is desirable.
(d) A receiver shall not unreasonably delay the server between rallies. The server may instigate a 30 second break for both players to towel down or take on fluid. Each player will be permitted two such breaks per game.
(e) If, by reason of injury or ill-health, a player is, in the opinion of the Tournament Organiser or Coach, unfit to continue playing then the match shall be stopped and awarded to the player's opponent or opponents.
(f) In a match consisting of more than one game, not more than five minutes interval shall be allowed between games.
Rules drawn up Nov 1930; revised Oct 1949; May 1951; June 1955, Oct 1959; May 1972; Dec 1995; Dec 2010, July 2022.
For more information, please contact the General Secretary through therfa.uk website.