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The Mark and Law Myths

Common misconceptions that can affect players, coaches and match officials

Purpose

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01 Unfamiliar Laws

Rugby has a number of laws that are surprisingly unfamiliar even to experienced players and coaches.

02 Player Safety & Misconceptions

Some misconceptions are harmless. Others can directly affect player safety, particularly when teams have different levels of law knowledge.

03 Clarifying World Rugby Laws

This resource examines several common rugby myths and explains what the World Rugby Laws actually say.

04 Intended Audience

It is intended for players, coaches, match officials, administrators and supporters.

The Mark

A mark is a method of stopping play and winning a free-kick by directly catching an opponent's kick. **[Law 17.1]**

To claim a mark, the player must:

01 22-Metre Line

Have at least one foot on or behind their own 22-metre line when catching the ball, or when landing after catching it in the air. The ball must also have reached the plane of the 22-metre line.

02 Direct Catch

Catch the ball directly from an opponent's kick before it touches the ground or another player.

03 Shout "Mark"

Simultaneously call **"mark"** when catching the ball.

Result: A correctly claimed mark results in the referee blowing their whistle, and awarding a free-kick to the team that claimed it.

What Happens When Someone Calls "Mark"?

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Law 17.3: "When a mark is called correctly, the referee immediately stops the game" and awards a **free-kick** to the team that claimed it.

SEQUENCE OF PLAY:

1. Kick → 2. Catch + "MARK!" → 3. Referee Stops Play → 4. Free-Kick

✓ Awarding the Free-Kick

- The referee awards a **free-kick** to the team that claimed the mark.
- The player who claimed the mark **normally takes** the free-kick.

! Why Does This Matter?

- Once "Mark!" is correctly called, referee blows whistle, and **play has instantly stopped**.
- Opposing players **must not continue** to tackle or challenge the catcher.

Safety Warning: Opponents unfamiliar with the law may unintentionally create a dangerous situation by continuing toward a catcher who expects play to stop.

Mark: Special Situations

+ Injured Player Exception

A teammate may take the mark if referee establishes:

1. The player **correctly claimed** the mark.
2. Injury occurred **during the act** of claiming it.
3. The player is **unable to take** the free-kick.

Requirement: All three conditions must be satisfied for a teammate to step in.

Result: Only then may a teammate take the free-kick.

! Goalposts or Crossbar Contact

Claiming After Rebound / Touch

A player may claim a mark after catching a ball that has touched the goalposts or crossbar, provided all other Law 17 requirements are met.

No Automatic Disqualification

Contact with goalposts or crossbar does not, by itself, prevent the player from claiming a mark.

Key Takeaway: As long as the ball hasn't touched the ground or another player, contact with goalposts/crossbar remains valid for a mark.

Mark: It Can Be Called In-Goal

✓ Myth vs. Reality

Myth: “You can't call mark in the in-goal.”

Reality: A mark can be claimed in the catcher's own in-goal.

World Rugby Definition: Expressly includes “the catcher’s own 22 or in-goal”.

Law 17.7: Specifically provides for a mark claimed in-goal.

Key Rule: Players do not lose the privilege of calling a mark simply because they are inside their own in-goal area.

! Where is the Free-Kick Taken?

1 **Claimed in the 22:**
At the place of the mark, but **at least five metres** from the try line.

2 **Claimed In-Goal:**
On the **five-metre line**, in line with the place of the mark.

Important Distinction: Free-kicks are never taken inside the in-goal area itself; play moves forward to the 5m line.

Mark: A Useful Pre-Match Conversation

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💬 Opposition Communication

When & Why to Communicate:

Particularly important when teams have different levels of law knowledge. If a coach knows their team regularly uses the mark, communicate before the match.

A simple message to opposition captain or coach:

"Just so everyone is aware, our players may call mark when catching kicks in our 22 or in-goal. If you hear 'mark', the referee will stop play."

Purpose: This is not asking for special treatment.

Goal: It is simply making sure both teams understand a law that can otherwise produce an unexpected collision.

! Match Officials Can Help

1 **Inform the Referee:**

Notify match officials early if your team frequently utilizes the mark in tactical play.

2 **Pre-Kick-Off Alignment:**

The referee can ensure the opposition captain clearly understands the law before kick-off.

Key Benefit: Referees facilitate clarity and smooth match management when both teams are aligned on law interpretations early.

Myth 1: Offside in In-Goal

✓ Myth vs. Reality

Myth: “There is no offside in in-goal.”

Reality: Offside applies because in-goal is part of the playing area.

World Rugby Definition: “Playing area: Field of play plus in-goal areas.”

Law 10.2: “A player can be offside anywhere in the playing area.”

Key Rule: Crossing the goal line does NOT eliminate offside restrictions.

Jurisdiction: Offside exists everywhere within the defined playing area boundaries.

! Logic & Practical Application

1 Legal Equation:

In-goal = part of playing area
Law 10.2 = offside exists in playing area

2 Enforcement Principle:

Offside players who cross the try line remain offside until put onside by legal play.

Practical Consequence:

Players cannot simply enter or remain in an offside position inside the in-goal area because they have crossed the try line.

Offside In-Goal: Why This Myth Exists

? Sources of Confusion

Separate Area Misconception:
Thinking of the in-goal as a completely separate area where normal open-play laws stop applying.

Phase Restrictions:
Associating the in-goal only with situations where certain phases of play cannot occur.

Remember: Field of play + in-goal = playing area.
The in-goal has specific laws for tries and grounding, but other general laws remain active.

§ Key Law References

1. **Definitions – Playing Area**
   Defines the full boundary including in-goal
2. **Law 10 – Offside & Onside in Open Play**
   Applies throughout the active playing area
3. **Law 21 – In-Goal**
   Governs grounding, tries, touch-downs & dead-ball

Key Takeaway: Specific in-goal laws supplement open-play rules without replacing them.
Entering in-goal does not cancel offside obligations.

Myth 2: You Need Two Players to Mark the Lineout

✓ Myth vs. Reality

Myth: “Two players are required to 'mark' or defend the mark of touch.”

Reality: You need 2 players from EACH team to form a lineout, not just from the defending team.

Law 18.11: “A minimum of two players from each team are required to form a lineout.”

Key Distinction: Minimum lineout = 2 players from throwing team AND 2 players from non-throwing team.

That is completely different from saying two defenders must stand at the mark of touch.

! Quick Throw & Formation

1. **Defenders Alone Do Not Form Lineout:**
   Even if 2 non-throwing players stand at touch, a lineout is not formed until both teams are present.

2. **Quick Throw Status:**
   A quick throw remains an option until the throwing team also puts at least two players on the line of touch.

Practical Consequence: Once BOTH teams have 2+ players on touch, the lineout is formed and quick throw is disallowed.

Until both minimums are met, quick throw options remain open.

Myth 3: “Ball Touching a Tree, Fence or Object”

✓ Myth vs. Reality

Myth: “If the ball touches a tree, fence or object, there can't be a quick throw.”

Reality: Not necessarily. This is a common piece of rugby folklore.

Law 18.1 defines touch when the ball touches the touchline or anything beyond it.

Law 18.1: “A ball is in touch when a ball not being held touches the touchline ... or anything beyond.”

Key Distinction: Hitting an object beyond touch puts the ball in touch.

However, that alone does NOT automatically prevent a player from executing a legal quick throw.

§ Law Breakdown & Analysis

1. **Object Beyond Touchline:**
   A tree, fence, or spectator stand is considered "anything beyond" the touchline under Law 18.1.

2. **Quick Throw Conditions:**
   Touching an inanimate object does NOT invalidate a quick throw unless another person touches the ball or lineout forms.

Key Takeaway: Hitting an object creates touch, but doesn't ruin quick throw eligibility.

As long as all other quick throw rules are respected, play can restart rapidly.

When Is a Quick Throw Disallowed?

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§ Law 18.5 Disallowed Conditions

A **Lineout Formed:** A lineout has already been formed.

B **Touched by Others:** The ball was touched after going into touch by anyone other than the thrower or carrier.

C **Different Ball:** A different ball is used.

Exclusive List: Law 18.5 explicitly defines ALL legal grounds for disallowing a quick throw.

If an occurrence is not listed in a, b, or c, it does not disallow the quick throw.

✓ Notice What Is NOT Listed

Inanimate objects beyond touchline:

- **A fence**
- **A tree**
- **A post**
- **A building**
- **Another inanimate object**

Ruling / Conclusion: If the ball goes into touch and subsequently hits an object beyond the touchline...

That fact alone does NOT create a Law 18.5 reason to disallow a quick throw.

Quick Throw: The Important Question

? The Mindset Shift

Instead of asking:

“Did the ball hit something?”

Ask:

“Was the ball touched by a person after it went into touch?”

Key Distinction: That distinction matters.

Focus on WHO touched the ball, not WHAT object the ball made contact with in touch.

✓ Practical Examples

Allowed Scenario:

Kick → crosses touchline → hits fence → ball retrieved

Result: **Quick throw MAY STILL BE POSSIBLE** (Law 18)

Disallowed Scenario:

Kick → crosses touchline → spectator/player touches ball → retrieved

Result: **Quick throw IS DISALLOWED** (Lineout required)

Rule Summary: Inanimate objects do not break quick throw eligibility.

Only human touch (other than the thrower/carrier) or forming a lineout disallows the quick throw.

Why Do These Myths Matter?

These are not simply trivia questions for referees. A mismatch in law knowledge directly impacts key areas on and off the field:

1 Player Safety

Safety Expectation: A player who calls "mark" may expect play to stop immediately.

Potential Hazard: An opponent who does not understand the law may continue toward the catcher.

2 Coaching

Misinformation Loop: Coaches may teach players tactics or habits based on outdated laws, local conventions, or rugby folklore.

Ensuring accurate knowledge at the coaching level prevents systemic errors on matchday.

3 Refereeing

Unnecessary Disputes: Players and coaches frequently challenge correct referee decisions because they genuinely believe a different law applies.

Shared understanding reduces frustration and builds mutual respect for match officials.

4 Match Management

Key Takeaway: A clear understanding of the relevant law prevents significant misunderstandings during a match.

Maintains match flow, safety, and fairness for everyone involved.

Key Takeaways & Summary

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1 Mark

Definition: Stops play & wins a free-kick by directly catching opponent's kick in own 22 or in-goal.

Exceptions: Teammate may take kick if catcher is injured during claim. Valid even off uprights/crossbar.

Effect: Correctly claimed mark stops play immediately.

2 Offside

In-Goal Offside: Offside position CAN exist inside the in-goal area.

Core Principle: The in-goal area is legally an integral part of the playing area.

3 Lineout

Minimum Formation: Exactly two players from each team (2 throwing, 2 non-throwing).

Misconception Cleared: No rule forces defending team to match or "mark" lineout numbers.

4 Quick Throw

Inanimate Objects: Contact with fence, post, or tree beyond touchline does NOT invalidate quick throw.

Key Rule: Only specific Law 18.5 conditions (human touch, lineout formed, different ball) disallow it.

Final Thought

★ Core Purpose

Rugby Knowledge Should Make the Game Safer and Clearer, Not More Complicated.

The purpose of knowing the Laws is not to gain an unexpected advantage over an opponent who does not know them.

When in doubt:

Check the Law.

✓ It Is To Help Ensure That:

1. **Players** know what to expect.
2. **Coaches** teach the correct law.
3. **Referees** apply the law consistently.
4. **Everyone** understands what is happening when the whistle blows.