RUGBY UNION LEVEL III REFEREE MAJOR PROJECT

'THE PACKAGE'- the presentation of rugby union

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1-BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THIS PROJECT

After the 1995 World Cup the game of Rugby was transformed from an amateur to professional sport. As an amateur code Rugby offered millions of people enjoyment and entertainment without the complexities and complications of professional sport, but as a professional code Rugby now finds itself completing for a market share in an aggressive and lucrative sporting industry. It needs to be presented in the best possible way to achieve high attendance at matches, and to maintain and expand its TV audience. Following the notion that a good product sells itself, Rugby must constantly strive to better its product thus attracting more people to the game, as spectators, as players and of course… as sponsors.

This project focuses on how Rugby, from **refereeing and Laws** point of view, is currently being presented and what possible path could be taken in future. It attempts to establish what roll/impact the referees and the Laws, have on selling it. All levels of Rugby have been considered, but attention was concentrated on the top level (professional rugby) where the influence and exposure is greatest. This project will highlight issues and make proposals on how an even better **'package'** could be presented.

2-METHOD

How people perceive something determines how they will respond to it. This notion is no different when considering people's enjoyment and appreciation of sport. How the game of Rugby is being perceived and how this could be enhanced is the basis of this project.

To understand these perceptions I completed a series of interviews and consulted a number of articles relating to this topic. The interviews focus on people involved in Rugby but also included representatives from other sporting codes in Australia. The interviews are broken down into different sections.

How is the game being officiated? To gauge how the game is currently being officiated and where improvements could be made, I interviewed a selection of current international referees, assessors and referee coaches. I also interviewed print and television journalists and commentators involved in Rugby.

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What are we selling? To determine what we are selling I interviewed the Head of Advertising and Promotions at the ARU, Lucinda Joyce, as well as consulting various books, articles and marketing material

What are other sports doing? To gain insight into what the 'competition' is doing and how they're doing it, I interviewed people involved in officiating other sports. Good ideas and lessons can be learned from keeping an eye on what others are doing, ideas can be adopted from other sports and used enhance our game.

Armed with this accumulated information I ask the question, **where too from here?** What are the areas of significance, relating to the referees and the laws, when considering the future of Rugby as a marketable product?

3-HOW IS THE GAME BEING OFFICIATED?

To establish just how Rugby is being officiated, I interviewed Rugby officials (referees and referees assessors/ coaches) and the Rugby media, who present the game to public.

I compiled two questionnaires; one for the officials and the other for the media. The answers presented are composite answers, which allow for a general insight into the issues without linking specific comments to specific people.

INTERVIEWS- REFEREES, REFEREE COACHES/ ASSESSORS

The referees:	Peter Marshall (International referee, Professional referee)
	Stuart Dickinson (International referee, Professional referee)
	George Ayoub (International referee, Referee Manager NSW)
Referees assessors/ coaches:	Sandy Macneill (International referee coach/ assessor)
	Brian Kinsey (International referee coach/ assessor)

Q. With the spectacle of the game in mind, what would you say is the general philosophy towards refereeing?

The general philosophy of referees in Australia is to encourage open positive play. The referee should create a safe environment, rewarding positive play, penalizing negative play and striving for continuity and consistency.

Q. What is expected of referees in the professional era? Is there a responsibility for referees to ensure the best possible product?

The general expectation of referees is have a professional attitude to the game, both in game preparation and training. A referee should play an ambassadorial role for his/her country and Rugby.

Referees in Australia, and possibly New Zealand and South Africa, are under pressure from their Union to provide an entertaining product. Northern Hemisphere referees are not under the same pressure as they have less competition from other similar sports. Professional referees are answerable to the IRB who expect a rigid approach to refereeing strictly to the laws of the game and their descriptors for assessments. This puts Australian referees into conflict with the requirements of the ARU (their employer) and the IRB (their selector). To get international appointments referees are required to comply with the IRB. In Australia this does not necessarily translate into an attractive product where players and spectators expect the referee to be positive and to blend in with the way the players are playing the game. It must be remembered that only a

handful of referees are professional and contracted either full time or part time to the ARU, all other referees are amateur.
On the field referees have a responsibility to ensure players play as positively as possible and allow them every opportunity to do this. To get the best result for the game, requires cooperation between the players and the referee, if this is not forthcoming the desired result will not be achieved.

Q. Is there a need for referees to be personally well presented and you do think this could have any effect on the overall package?
Referees have always been required to be well presented both on and off the field, it is seen as part of the overall package. Referees are ambassadors for their countries and the game, and present to the world an image of their country. A professional attitude should extend beyond the field allowing others the comfort of inviting and sending referees around the world in the full knowledge that they present a positive image of their union. Some referees did not receive international appointments in the amateur era due to poor off field presentation; this has not changed in the professional era.

Q. ***How does the public perceive referees?***
The general public perceives referees poorly, a policeman, however some rugby followers view the referee with a degree of respect. Generally the referee appears to be a "necessary evil" and the person open to criticism and ridicule by supporters of both sides. This has become an ever-increasing problem in recent years and effects the recruitment and retention of new referees. There is a strong feeling that the ARU should carry out more work to lift the profile of the referee and educate the public
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Q. ***What factors do you think have a negative impact on game as a spectacle?***
The Tackle Law is difficult to interpret. "Things" are happening so quickly at the breakdown that the referee has difficulty being in the correct position to make the right decision all the time. The inconsistencies that can occur within a game and between games do little to enhance the spectacle.
The number of infringements a referee can blow during a game if he/she stuck to the letter of the law seem too many. This applies generally to the game but is most common at the **breakdown** where both players and referees are force to make quick decisions to either play on or be liable to penalty.
Advantage is constantly being scrutinized as a part of the game where something could be done to create a better product. 'When is advantage over?' is a constant debate amongst referees'. For example: when the non-offending team just kicks the ball away during advantage, requesting the

penalty. Matters to be considered are: Is advantage over once the non offending team elects to kick the ball out? Should the referee ask the non-offending team if they require advantage? The speed of the match will not allow this to occur. Should the referee just blow the penalty? What effect would this have on the spectacle?

Negative attitude for players and coaches: If the players aren't prepared to play in the spirit of the game there is little the referee can do about it. 'Repeated infringements' are an example of a negative play (attitude), these infringements break continuity by preventing quality possession for the opposition. There are teams and players who continually play to the edge of the law and beyond with the attitude that if they don't get caught then it's OK.

Lack of law knowledge by the players and the many **grey areas** associated with the laws**.**

Q. ***Are there any laws you'd like to see altered or amended to create a better product?***

Tackle Law (the breakdown) needs addressing. It needs to be simplified. The law should be made much clearer, so players, coaches and the general public have a better understanding.

Offside lines, providing more space for players would allow for a more open and possibly more exciting game.

T**he process of changing the law**; referees must be included in any discussions, law changes often do not consider if it is possible to be refereed, having regard to referee positioning etc.

Q. Do you think the players fully understand the laws and if not how can this be addressed?

No, players do not fully understand the laws. They tend to understand the basics, but not the nitty gritty. The number of stoppages in a game could be reduced if players had better understanding of the laws resulting in a better product. Coaches need to make themselves more au fait with the laws, and pass this knowledge on to the players as it can clearly advantage their team. Perhaps players and coaches should do a annual Law Exam or law course. Several provincial teams do this as part of their pre-season preparation. Referees could play a part in player/coach education by attending player training sessions – not only for the players to gain clarity on certain laws, but also for the referee to understand what the players are trying to achieve on the field.

Q. Do you think the general public understands the laws and if not how can this be addressed?

Generally no, educating the public could be undertaken in a number ways:

At games, video clips could be shown outlining certain laws (prior to the game and at half time). A law column could be written in the match program. They did this at the Olympics in Sydney for sports like baseball and hockey with good effect.

On rugby shows like 'Inside Rugby' a high profile player could do a short segment on one of the laws.
There is also a need for commentators to get more educated on the laws as it's through them that the word gets out.
Some of these suggestions are already currently in place.

Q. Do you think the current method of dealing with foul play has any effect on the on the spectacle?

The current method of dealing with foul play does have an impact on the spectacle, but in some ways it enhances the game i.e. Statistics show that when a player is off the field there are usually tries scored. Without the option of the red or yellow card the game could deteriorate, with players continually killing the ball or generally being negative, the deterrent is necessary. Players should not be allowed to play outside of the law, especially when it comes to safety, it sends the wrong message to those watching, especially parents of possible future players. If rugby is depicted as an unsafe sport, those parents will encourage their children to take up other sports ultimately shrinking the pool of talent. The issue of liability was also brought up with the referees or the association being held liable for inappropriate actions that may lead to injury.
There was strong support for the way the referees deal with foul play and negative play as compared with putting a player on report and then having him dealt with after the event

Q. Do you think the current method of dealing with injuries (stoppages in play) has any effect on the spectacle?

There have been improvements in this area in recent times with play continuing unless the injured player is in the way of play or is a member of the front row at scrum time. However players feign injury to slow the game down, so their team can rest and recoup, and this is difficult for the referee to manage. It is usually a front row player or a player in the way so the referee has no option but to stop play. Statistics in Super 12 show that some provincial teams regularly top the injury stoppages per game, season after season. This area should be looked at by the IRB.
Regarding general stoppages during a match, it is difficult for a referee to know the number of stoppages that are occurring. Even if the referee was aware of the number, there are only certain stoppages that he/she can help manage, at the end of the day the cooperation of players is paramount in this area.

Q. Is the assessment process hindering the overall spectacle?

On the one hand the assessment process is bringing consistency and higher standards into refereeing, on the other it is hindering referees in facilitation an attractive product. It is generally seen that the assessors in the stand are dominating the way the game is being refereed. Some of

the best games over the last 5 years have not been refereed technically perfectly however they have been a great advertisement for the game. It is felt that accuracy alone does not get the desired result. A referee can get a score of 95 out of 100 by following the laws strictly and have 35 penalties in the game (which more often than not detracts from an open free flowing game). There was support for the process being overhauled as it seems the game has "outgrown the form" This review should be open to input from the stakeholders (referees, marketers etc) and should be more reflective of the whole game, it should make allowance for the assessor to judge the positives of a referees performance and not the negatives as is currently in place.
Referees should not "referee for the assessor". They should referee as to the Laws and just get on with the job at hand. The referee should not be concerned with the process, he should be aware of it, suggest changes to it, but not be concerned with it during the match.

Q. Below is a rating of three aspects related to rugby, should the order change in any way for 'high profile' games (Super 12, Test matches etc)?

1. ***Player safety***
2. ***Player enjoyment***
3. ***Spectator enjoyment***

Unanimous that player safety is paramount with the notion that spectator enjoyment will be a flow on from player enjoyment.

INTERVIEWS MEDIA

Gordon Bray (Rugby commentator Channel 7)
Jim Maxwell (Rugby commentator ABC)
Greg Clark (Rugby commentator Fox)
Greg Growden (Rugby writer Sydney Morning Herald)
Peter Fitzsimons (Rugby writer Sydney Morning Herald)

Q. With your experience in rugby union, how would you say the current international referees (on the field) are doing in promoting an attractive package?

A general response was that the Northern Hemisphere referees had to do a lot more work to catch up to the performances of Southern Hemisphere referees. A common opinion was that Northern Hemisphere referees are too pedantic and laws orientated detracting from the spectacle of the game. There was also a concern shown with the inconsistencies and law interpretations between referees from different countries- the most notable differences seem to be the interpretation of **advantage**, **obstruction** and the **tackle law**. There was a belief that referees should be inconspicuous and that there are too many strong personalities officiating, with some

of the referees becoming performers themselves, performing this should be left to the players. There was an observation that referees seem fitter than they have been in the past but here again the Northern Hemisphere referees need to do more work.

Q. What do you expect from a top referee and do you think there is a responsibility for referees to strive for an attractive product.

Yes the referees do have responsibility to strive for an attractive product not only for the spectators but for the players as well.

What is expected from a top referee?

- Good management of players and situations- maintain order
- Good communicators with the players without becoming too friendly
- Good understanding of the game and what the players are trying to achieve.
- Common sense refereeing- not always to referee to the exact letter of the law.
- A strong focus of continuity
- An understanding of the commercial viability of the game.
- Reward positive play and act strongly against negative play
- Accountability- they should be dropped for poor performances.
- Frequently perform; referees should be appointed more often, with a smaller group of elite referees doing more.
- Impartiality- the referee must ensure not team gains an unfair advantage.

Q. What factors have a negative impact on the game as a spectacle?

Inconsistency: this was seen as one of the major problems- both between different referees interpretations from one game to the next and within a game. The standout incident for inconsistency on the field was seen to be at the **tackle**.

Complicated laws: too many grey areas and 50/50 calls during a match creating frustration for players and spectators alike.

Continuity - the flow of the game: Referees that don't allow the game to flow, constantly bringing play back when there is an opportunity to let play continue.

Stoppages: Relating to players, referees and the laws-frequent stoppages that break the continuity.

Penalties: a high number of penalties

Advantage: the referees that don't understand or have a good feel for this law can have a negative impact on the game, particularly when looking for continuity. There was a feeling that the law is being abused allowing teams a 'second bite at the cherry' by avoiding making a decision.

Northern Hemisphere vs. Southern Hemisphere referees: a point that consistently arose from this group was the difference in interpretations between the officials from the Europe and those from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Referees that are too pedantic: good referees will pick up on the blatant (serious) infringements but might overlook minor transgressions allowing the game to flow.

Referee as the centre of attraction: there was a feeling that referees can play too much of a role in the game and its outcome- there was a strong feeling that the referee, although necessary, should play a lesser roll in the game, letting the players take centre stage.

Performing for assessors: referees that are more concerned about performing for the people assessing them than the game itself.

Players not complying: players that do not play within the framework of the law.

Q. Are there any laws you'd like to see altered or amended to create a better product, please elaborate?

Breakdown-tackle/ruck: seen as a major problem, with a high number of penalties and much confusion. There was a strong feeling that the law is too 'grey' in this area and should be simplified with the player in possession allowed more time to execute his options. The team with the ball should generally have the advantage in these situations. The feeling was that the defending team had too much opportunity at the breakdown.

Point scoring: There was a suggestion that penalties should only count two points rather than three thus reducing the option of constantly kicking for goal.

Penalties vs. Free kicks: There was comment that certain penalties awarded were for discretions not worthy of three points- perhaps a free kick or a lesser penalty.

Lineout: Some felt that the gap in the lineout should be made larger than it is currently (1m) while there was comment that lineouts should return to the old laws i.e. no lifting and a more even contest for the ball.

Maul: comment was made that the current law governing the rolling maul seemed to favor the team in possession and allowed the ball carried to be obstructed by his own team- it is seen to be an unfair contest.

Offside: Accidental offside, if not impeding the defensive team, should be overlooked.

Q. It is often said that the general public does not understand the laws or the referees' interpretation of them; do you think the game needs to be simplified?

Yes.

Further comments:

- The breakdown was again mentioned as the major area of concern
- The laws need to be fairer and clear cut.

- More uniform interpretations of the laws by the referees are required.
- The game needs more airtime, the more people watch the game the better understanding they will have of it.
- Penalty explanations e.g. hands in ruck, should be displayed on the screen at game and on TV allowing the public to understand what a particular penalty was for.
- More use of the microphone on the referee to communicate with the spectators
- More latitude to the attacking team; lessening the penalties

Q. Referees are encouraged to deal strictly with foul play with the use on yellow and red cards if necessary, does this have a negative impact on the package or can it be seen to promote the sport in any way?

From all of the interviewees there was no problem with the current use of cards in the game, this system was viewed as being positive for the game when used consistently and with common sense. When players who play outside of the law are off the field, opportunities are created for the non-offending team- more opportunities= more tries= better spectacle. It was suggested that even more yellow cards could be issued, not only in dealing with foul play but also with negative play (professional fouls). The prevention of negative play was considered of high importance, there was even a suggestion for a sighting procedure to be in place for repeated and deliberate offenders.

Q. The current method of dealing with stoppages in play (particularly for injuries) is often criticized for reducing the excitement of the game. As a television product do you think these stoppages create opportunities – slow motion replays, game analysis, or even for advertising time for the network?

The majority response to this question was to get as much playing time as possible out to the public - it is live Rugby that is being sold. There was strong support to keep the game flowing as much as possible and minimize the stoppages. It was acknowledged that for certain television channels the breaks were useful for ad-breaks but their usefulness did not outweigh the frustration to the spectators caused through constant stoppages. There was a suggestion that the match clock should be stopped at opportune times during the game to get as much playing time as possible an example being before a penalty attempt at goal. Regarding substitution stoppages; there was a suggestion that a number of substitutions should be made simultaneously cutting down on extra stoppages especially in the second half of the game. Often all 7 substitutions are made late in the game making for anything from 3-7 stoppages for each side.

Q. Below is a rating of three factors to consider for the rugby referee, do you think the order should change in any way for 'high profile games (super 12, Test matches etc.)

1. ***Player safety***
2. ***Player enjoyment***
3. ***Spectator enjoyment***

All interviewees responded that player safety should always take top priority. There was a case made for interchanging player enjoyment and spectator enjoyment with the notion that the players are being well paid to provide an attractive product. It was however also noted that the latter two ratings go hand in hand, if the players are enjoying themselves it's likely the spectators will too, and visa versa.

4-WHAT ARE WE SELLING?

Rugby Union is the original from of rugby; it originated at Rugby School in England in 1823 and has been played in Australia since 1829 with the first club forming in 1864. The game has been developed internationally over the years and twenty countries will compete for the World Cup in 2003 (currently held by Australia).

The object of Rugby Union as described in the Law book is "*that two teams of fifteen, ten or seven players each, observing fair play according to the Laws and sporting spirit, should by carrying, passing, kicking and grounding the ball score as many points as possib*le." Although is describes the object of the game itself it doesn't tell the full story of what it is we are trying to sell.

In an attempt to fully answer this question I've not only looked at the mechanics (workings) of the sport, but also tried to understand what more it has to offer. I interviewed **Lucinda Joyce (Head of Advertising and Promotions) at the ARU** to find out how they are marketing the sport.

The ARU recognizes that Rugby has both great sporting and life attributes, which combine to give it a competitive advantage. As a sport, Rugby is a fast, powerful and rugged game exhibiting skills, teamwork, sportsmanship and a love of the game. At its highest-level Rugby is played between counties from all parts of the globe with many rivalries dating back for over a century. The life attributes that Rugby exhibits are camaraderie, mateship, tradition and heritage, honesty, social and community involvement and national pride.

The ARU is aiming it's marketing on an emotional rather than a functional level and have recognized four key attributes as their brand values. These are **Pride** (National), **Mateship**, (camaraderie/ teamwork), **Love of the Game** and **Tradition and Heritage**.

National Pride is a value that encompasses the unique global nature of the Game and represents the spirit of Australia. At a national level the Wallabies play an all-important role in enhancing this pride, while at a Super 12 level the drive is more towards state pride with New South Wales, Queensland, and the ACT as representatives.

Mateship recognizes that loyalty, unselfishness, teamwork and the fun of camaraderie are essential parts of Rugby and a treasured Australian value.

The Love of the Game recognizes the personal affection for the pleasure of playing or watching rugby.

Tradition and heritage that Rugby offers is centered on a code of behaviour dating back to 1823.

The ARU also has a mission to expand the participation and fan base of Australian Rugby by gaining recognition for the values of Rugby, but also by strengthening the grass roots system, developing talent, strengthening and expanding a professional competition (Super 12), and maintaining competitive excellence at the international level.

People involved with the sport have, over a number of years, developed the emotional side of rugby. The lawmakers and officials can play a role in ensuring the game itself delivers an attractive product and maintains the traditions and essence of the game. It is therefore important to look at the functional attributes that make the game what it is, I have titled this 'The Mechanics of Rugby'.

The Mechanics of Rugby:
Rugby is a unique sport in many ways but there are a few standout attributes that not only make the game interesting and attractive but also very different from many of its competitors:

The **size and skills of the players** varies vastly within the same team, Rugby caters for all body types, all with varying skills. There are very few sports, if any, which have a place for the tall and the short, the large and the small. Certain players have the height and athletic ability similar to those seen on a basketball court and are require to win quality possession at lineouts and restarts. In the scrums, broad powerful men, with skills similar to wrestling/ power lifters are required in the front row to ensure good controlled possession and aggression. Some players are required to be big and powerful runners with strong defensive capabilities, but there also room for smaller, more agile players with passing, kicking and running skills- players who can beat defenders with movement rather brute strength, and players with vision and the ability to make space and create opportunities for the players around them. The modern game has expanded on the skills base across the entire team meaning that even the traditional 'workhorses' (the tight forwards) of the teams are required to be **multi-skilled,** possessing high levels of fitness and all-round ability. Rugby is not a sport where a player can get away with possessing only one skill, for example if a player can kick a ball but lacks defensive, distribution or running skills he will soon be found out at the highest level.

A fair contest for the ball is another unique feature of Rugby and is rarely found in other sports. In almost all phases of play both teams can compete for the ball. When a player is tackled, an opposition player can gain possession of the ball without stopping the game or relying on the player mistakenly losing it. A team does not have only a certain number of chances to play the ball but can retain possession for as long as they're good enough to. Quality possession of the football is the cornerstone of winning Rugby and a fair contest for the ball ensures the game is always somewhat unpredictable thus interesting.

The players have a **variety of options** in Rugby. A player in possession can run, kick or pass the ball which, if done with skill and timing, provide variety, spontaneity and excitement to the game. There is no set formula, a team might play a certain pattern of Rugby but without players who can recognize good opportunities their game will become predictable and easier to defend against. Morne du Plessis, who captained the Springboks in the 1970's and early 1980's, said "*there must be freedom of approach to the game of rugby. Rugby has to go that way to continue to be the great game that it is- an emphasis on individual choice- to make it an attractive sport.*"

These unique attributes are treasured parts of the game and should be regarded the utmost importance whenever the laws are altered, they should not however be seen as an excuse to change nothing at all. Rugby is a constantly evolving sport and changes are sometimes required to make it a better product.

5-WHAT ARE OTHER SPORTS DOING?

I interviewed people involve with officiating in 4 team sports currently being played in Australia. The four sports are Australian Rules (AFL), Rugby League (NRL), Netball, and Field Hockey.

AFL:

Australian Rules Football is the most popular winter sport in Australia and is played across the whole country with professional teams in most major capitals.

I interviewed **Craig Davies- General manager umpiring AFL (NSW/ ACT)** for his comment on the sport and how it is officiated.

The **number of officials** for a professional game is 10, 3 on the field, 2 between the goals, 3 boundary umpires (1 interchange) and 2 emergency umpires who are not on the field unless required. There are currently 32 umpires in the **national squad**.

The field consists of an oval with vertical goal posts on opposite sides; it is divided in to three zones, two end zones and a mid zone. The field umpires coordinate responsibility between one another by handing over control when the game moves out of his zone. A single game consists of four quarters of 20 minutes each.

The emphasis, when promoting the sport is that it is a physical, skillful and athletic sport with **minimal stoppages**. When there is a stoppage in play the clock is stopped and then started again when play resumes thereby achieving 20 minutes of actual playing time per quarter. After one team has scored the clock is stopped and the game is started only after a television commercial break.

There are four **interchange players** on each side that can take the place of a player on the field at any time during the game.

Regarding **rule changes**; there are about 4 –5 minor amendments made each year.

Regarding Rugby:

AFL officials envy Rugby **players respect** for their referee.

Drawbacks for Rugby are the **Inconsistency** in rulings and the limited **pool of officials'** - there is not a large enough group refereeing consistently well at the top level.

RUGBY LEAGUE:

Rugby league is a similar sport to rugby union and is probably rugby's closest competition. It began in the late nineteenth century as a professional form of rugby and is played in most countries that union is played. The most interest in the sport comes from the east coast of Australia and the north of England

I interviewed **Nathan Maguirk (Competition Coordinator NRL)** for his comment on the game and how it is officiated.

Referees are encouraged to **manage** the game to prevent **penalties** – talk the players out of playing outside of the law to minimize stoppages. The touch judges are also expected to help the referee by communicating with him over two-way communication and to talk to (manage) the players out wide (nearest to them) to prevent penalties etc.

If there is an **injury** to a player, the game continues unless the player is in the way or it is a serious injury.

In dealing with serious **foul play** incidents the referee has the option of sending the offending player off or putting him on report. Once on report the player remains on the field and the incident is dealt with by an appointed judiciary post match. There are three grading for dangerous play (high tackles); Careless, reckless and intentional, each has significance in the punishment handed down to the guilty player.

The referee can issue a **10-minute suspension** on a player for repeated infringements and professional fouls but <u>not</u> for foul play, there is no sin-bin for foul play.

There is a **video referee** at each professional game. The video referees are all specialized former top grade referees whose role it is to assist referees on calls when requested, however the video referee also has a coaching role for the field referee and can communicate with the referee during breaks and at other opportune times during the game. The video referee does not tell the referee what to do but rather advises him, this advice is usually for something the referee may be missing or is unaware of.

The **advantage law** in Rugby League is much shorter than that played in union. The advantage only last for one play, if no advantage is gained the game will be halted, otherwise it is allowed to continue.

Players may be **interchanged** during the game at any time, a total of 12 interchanges are permitted per team. This wasn't always the case as before last year when unlimited interchanges were allowed. The change in the rule was made in an attempt to return rugby league to what it was, a game with a component of endurance for athletes.

Regarding Rugby:

The amount of **stoppages** in the game was considered a drawback for the sport as well as the **inconsistency** in referee interpretations.

NETBALL:

Netball is an international sport and is the largest participation sport for women in Australia. The Australian team currently holds both the World and Commonwealth.

I interviewed **Carol Phillips (Umpires development officer NSW)** for her comment on the game and how it is officiated.
There are **two umpires** per game whose role is to control the game by seeing to it that the players play within the rules.
There is a **contact rule** preventing any intentional contact with an opposition player. If there is an accidental contact the umpire must decide whether this had any effect on the play. If there is no effect then play continues.
The **advantage rule** is applied for a far shorter length of time than in Rugby. The referee makes a verbal call and makes an advantage signal, if play continues without effect the advantage is deemed gained and there is no stoppage.
There have been no significant **rule changes** is recent times.
Regarding **safety** of players; a frequent and serious injury often occurs when a player lands after catching the ball. The players jump in the process of catching to place them in a better position for the next play- once the player is in possession they may only take one step before passing the ball. Officials have <u>not</u> made moves to amend this law as it is felt there would be more contact with other players if more steps were allowed.

Regarding Rugby:
The **strategie**s of the game were found to be confusing.
Advantage is played for too long.
Safety of players on the ground (boots in) was a concern.

FIELD HOCKEY:
Hockey is an international sport played at the top level by both men and women. The Australian women's team is current world champions while the men's team is rated in the top 6 teams in the world.
I interviewed **Brian Jones (Umpires director NSW hockey)** for his comment on the game and how it is officiated.
There are **two umpires** per game; they operate down opposite sides of the field with their field of responsibility being divided diagonally across the field.
The umpires are required to be **highly skilled** as it is a very technical game.
Compared to other sports, hockey has battled to a gain large spectator base, probably as it is a highly technical game and is seen as a 'difficult' television product. Changes made to accommodate television spectators though; some of the changes are listed below:

- The **playing surface** for top level matches is synthetic grass allowing the ball to roll evenly across the surface, this in turn allows players better control of the ball to display their skills.
- Players are not to wear white or green shoes or socks- these colors can be mistaken for the ball or the green pitch respectively.
- The umpires are required to signal the reason for a penalty allowing the spectator more understanding of what happened.
- The **offside law** was removed allowing players to move freely across the length of the field allowing for a more open game with few stoppages.
- A shot directly at goal after a penalty corner must strike the backboard (approx. 0,5m high) to be counted as a goal. This was done as a safety precaution as well as adding skill to scoring from this position.
- A penalty corner is now **played out** after full time preventing negative play from the opposition from working in their favor.

The **advantage law** is different to Rugby in that it is more like a **disadvantage law** – if a team is not disadvantaged, play continues.

Regarding Rugby :

The point was made that the **clock** keeps running when there is a **kick at goal**. This was seen as a waste of potential playing time.

6- WHERE TOO FROM HERE?

Four areas of focus have been identified from the interviews and research. These areas are:

1. The **Ethos of the Game**
2. The **Philosophy** of referees
3. The **preparation** of referees
4. The **Laws** of the Game.

What follows is an opinion formed out of the interviews and research undertaken as to what could be done in these areas to enhance the presentation of Rugby Union.

1. THE ETHOS OF RUGBY:

Most of the suggestions in this section stem from the chapter 'What are we selling?' where I looked at Rugby as marketable product. As mentioned in this chapter, Rugby possesses both **sporting** and **life attributes** that contribute to make it the great game it is.

Life attributes:

The **life attributes** of Rugby have been developed by people involved with the game over many years and there is only limited effect that referees and lawmakers can have on these. Although the ARU has recognized life attributes relating specifically to Australia, it must be noted that these attributes have developed similarly in Rugby playing countries across the world. Rugby is truly competitive at an international level, which generates huge interest across the country and makes it an attractive and marketable product. There have been reports however from certain professional players, that with the advent of professionalism these attributes have somewhat diminished at the top level. This is inevitable as players are seen more as commodities than they were during the amateur era. It is warming that the ARU recognizes these attributes as being part of the game to be marketed to the public. It is up to the ARU along with the IRB to ensure that these attributes remain part of the game at the top level. Regarding Rugby at lower levels (amateur), these life attributes have been part of the game as it has developed over the years and will continue to do so baring any major restructuring. Where referees and lawmakers can play their part is to ensure a **fair contest** with the game **played in the spirit of Rugby**.

Spirit of the Law:

To ensure it retains its tradition and heritage, to reinforces the notion of mateship and to develop the love for the game, Rugby needs to be played to the spirit of the Laws of the Game. This is

written into the Laws as part of the definition of Foul Play. In the same law under the sub-heading Dangerous play and Misconduct there is a passage that reads '*A player must not do anything that is against the* ***spirit of good sportsmanship*** *in the playing enclosure'*. Now, what is considered poor sportsmanship can be construed as being subjective and incident specific- there may be no specific laws that deal with the incident in question. It is up the referee, through his experience and understanding of the game, to determine whether a player is playing outside of the spirit of the game. A good deal of **common sense** is required in dealing with these incidents. Rugby has always had an element of gamesmanship, the grey areas in the Laws helping to contribute to this. What would the game be like without characters that have the ability to manipulate Laws to their benefit or have a 'friendly' chat to the opposition and referee alike? One only has to think of the great All Black hooker and captain, Sean Fitzpatrick, to understand what I'm saying.

Having said all this, there is a line that should not be crossed, and referees require a firm and decisive method of recognizing and dealing with bad sportsmanship. Already in place in NSW is the issue of racism on the pitch, if a player insults another player using racially offensive language he is immediately sent off. Policies like this need to be constantly updated to reflect what is deemed acceptable behaviour on the field of play.

An issue that needs more attention is the behaviour spectators at the game. The level of referee abuse seems higher than in the past. A code of conduct needs to be formulated and presented to Rugby spectators

Sporting Attributes:

When considering the **sporting attributes** of rugby, referees and particularly lawmakers do have a major part to play in maintaining and improving what we already have. The three attributes listed in the earlier chapter: the **variety size and skill of players**, **a fair contest for the ball** and the **variety of options** to players, all require input but the most important factor to consider is the assurance that the game is played in a **safe environment**.

Safety:

Player safety has always held top priority for referees and should continue to be. This attitude was echoed by all the referees, referee assessors and media personalities interviewed. The game must be perceived as safe to the public to attract new young players without losing its rugged and physical image. In the modern game there are more big tackles (hits) made previously but with strict and consistent enforcement of legal tackles by referees, most of these do not cause serious injury. The current officiating of foul play was positively viewed by those interviewed. Players who dangerously tackle/strike an opposing player, without the appropriate censure from the

referee, create a negative image of the sport. Players still retain the latitude to ensure a physical presence on the field, an important part of the game, without having to do so outside of the Laws. Many of the tackles that go unpunished in League are deemed unacceptable in Union and I'm not alone in thinking that Rugby has got it right for the long-term survival and promotion of the sport. Other examples of how this safety element has been addressed in the recent past are: the introduction of the blood bin, substitutions for injured front row forwards, and thorough inspection of the players' footwear and clothing prior to the game. A few suggestions for change regarding player safety would include, **more involvement from the touch judges or TMO (Television Match Official), referee education** in injuries and first aid, and a **head bin**.

The **touch judges or TMO** should have the authority to make a *mayday*[1] call to the referee over the two-way system. In a recent test match in Argentina an Australian player fell awkwardly and was trapped at the bottom of a ruck out of view of the referee but in view of the near side Touch Judge. The player didn't suffer any serious injury. However, the minor neck injury that was sustained could have been avoided by a call from the near side touch judge informing the referee to stop the game and prevent more players from falling on top of the defenseless player. The touch judge or the TMO should have the authority to inform the referee to stop the game with a safety call, as the players' safety should take priority over the referee's control of the match. The team of three (or in this case four) should extend to include matters of safety. For the TMO to get involved is important as he has another view of proceedings and is also assisted with footage on television monitors if required. Just imagine if the TMO had spotted the pitch invader in 'that' Durban test match earlier this year- if the referee could have been warned that there was a spectator running his way he may have been able to react to the situation earlier instead of being tackled from behind and injured (in this case it was the referee safety in question… but we'd like to think they're at least as important as the players).

Referee education regarding player safety is twofold, firstly the anticipation of possible injury or injury situations and secondly the recognition of injuries (their seriousness, whether blood is involved etc.). On the first point there are certain body positions that could open players up to possible injury. Referees should be able to recognize these positions and possibly prevent an injury from accruing- much like when there is a pile up of bodies and the referee stops the game and awards a scrum as a safety procedure. Referees should have to complete, as part of their general education, a course highlighting certain incidents, body positions or passages of play that would allow them to make more informed decisions in this regard. It would be good to shown referees footage of incidents involving injuries or potential injury situations as that they could

become familiar with what they are looking for. The example mentioned in the previous paragraph could have been avoided if the touch judge had recognized the seriousness of the situation. Conversely, if referees could be educated on what is considered a hard but fair tackle, which add to the spectacle, unnecessary stoppages might be avoided. This referee education would however be more relevant to referees at lower levels as professional athletes usually have the physical and technical capabilities to handle most dangerous situations that may transpire on the field. Regarding the second point, it states in the Law book that '*if the referee decides- with or* ***without*** *the advice of a doctor or other medically qualified person- that a player is so injured that the player should stop playing, the referee may order that player to leave the playing area'*. With this being an important decision to make in the context of any game one would think the person making it should have some sort of training or expertise to assist him.

There have been calls for the institution of a **Head Bin** so that a player who receives a blow to the head can be temporarily substituted and resume playing after being assessed by a doctor or medically trained person. The head bin, unfortunately, could easily be abused by coaches looking to use an impact player for a short period of the game. It is however something to look at by the IRB when considering the safety of players.

Variety of Players:

As discussed earlier, the **variety** in the **size of players** and their respective **skills** are an integral part of the game and are directly related to the Laws of the Game. The Laws of the game will be dealt with in more depth later in this project but a few phases or play worth noting in this regard are the scrums and the lineout. Without contested scrums and lineouts rugby would lose certain body types and skills that have become an integral part of the game. These are two attributes that rugby possesses that allow for both broad and powerful and tall and athletic to exist in the same sporting team. The contested scrum, in particular, is facet of play that is unique to Rugby; any thought of removing contested scrums from the game would seriously affect what the game is. It must be noted, however, that scrappy and untidy scrums can be both dangerous and unspectacular. Referees are required to be constantly vigilant in this area of the game to ensure the players' safety by being proactive in sorting out the scrums. This calls for strong player management and a good understanding (if this is possible) of what is going on in the scrums. Interaction with players and coaches by referees should be encouraged to gain as much knowledge as possible about this unique aspect of the game.

Fair contest for the ball:

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[1] If a player finds himself in a position of potential serious injury he, or one of his teammates, should call 'mayday'. On hearing the call the referee must immediately blow his whistle to stop play then

As the laws are currently written there is a genuine contest for the ball at most phases in play. Although there is seldom a win against the feed in the scrum, the opposition do have the option of striking for the ball or gaining possession through physical dominance in the scrums, this can cause turnover in possession by pushing the opposition off the ball or can reduce the quality of ball the opposition has to utilize. In the lineout more balls are being won against the throw than in the past four or five years and in general play either side can gain possession if on side and skillful enough. These areas are of less concern than the two identified for attention, these being the **Maul** and the **Tackle** situations. Concerns were raised that the maul can give an unfair advantage to the team in possession while the tackle sometimes gives the defending team too much of a chance to create a turnover in possession. These two areas will be dealt with in more depth in the laws section of this chapter.

Player options:

Also directly linked to the Laws, the range of options that players have on a rugby field are seen as a unique feature of the game. The fact that there is a contest for the ball at most phases of play means that possession, although important, is not all consuming for the players, allowing them to try things that would seem too daring for other codes. Also there is opportunity to turn defence into attack in the same passage of play, which makes for an exciting product. Here the referee's role would be to allow the players every opportunity to display their chosen option. This is particularly the case when playing **advantage**, where referees should be encouraged to play advantage at every opportunity. The referee should also ensure that the offside lines are adhered to as this will give the players in possession the time and space to exercise their options as effectively as possible.

2. PHILOSOPHY OF REFEREES

Referring to the basic philosophy as complied from interviews with the referees and assessors: *The general philosophy of referees in Australia is to encourage open positive play. The referee should create* ***a safe environment****, rewarding* ***positive play****, penalizing* ***negative play*** *and strive for* ***continuity*** *and* ***consistency****.* How does the referee go about this?

The Safety aspect has been dealt with in the preceding section of this chapter. However let us take a look at the other points highlighted.

Positive play vs Negative play:

A referee at the top level of the game must have a **good 'feel'** for the game. He must understand what the players are trying to achieve, the patterns of play and the mood of the situation (tense,

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follow a set procedure to minimize or prevent possible injury to the player.

aggressive, friendly etc.) It has become clear that to promote the game as a spectacle it cannot survive with referees who referee too strictly to the laws. If a pedantic referee is officiating the number of stoppage and penalties are bound to increase, dramatically removing much of the spectacle of the game. The referee should be encouraged to **manage** situations and communicate with the players to achieve the best result. Also the referee must recognize the severity of an indiscretion, as there are certain times that play should be allowed to continue despite players doing things that are outside the Laws of the game - e.g. obstruction that has no impact on play. This 'feel' for the game is difficult to coach but can be achieved through experience, observation and self-analysis. Referees should be encouraged to analyse the game and to scrutinize their performances without trying to justify what they have done. If referees are pressured into doing their job too strictly the game as a spectacle will suffer. The process of **assessment** should be looked at in this regard. There is a feeling from referees that the assessment process, although bringing more consistency to refereeing at the top level, needs to be less negative in its approach. There need to be areas in the assessment process that reward referees for taking positive actions that achieve positive results. Using the current assessment form, a referee could score high marks for a match that is a total dud as a spectacle. The referee should be mindful of the quality of entertainment provided when making his decisions and should strive not only for an accurate and consistent personal performance but also for the best match presentation possible. A possible match checklist for a referee during a game might be as follows:

1. Accurate and consistent interpretation of the Law
2. Recognize negative and positive play and react appropriately
3. Allow play to flow - allow the players to express themselves and exhibit their skills
4. Be mindful that both the player and the spectators should be enjoying themselves.

With regards to the detection of negative play, the **TMO** could play a part in assisting the referee on the field by sharing his educated observations of the game as it develops. For example, the TMO might spot a certain player perpetrating foul play that is missed by the three officials on the field. He should be able to inform the referee at an opportune moment in play, referring to the incident and the players involved. The referee could then in turn admonish the offending player, which could possibly prevent a recurrence of the incident. The use of **yellow and red cards** in the game is seen as a positive tool in curbing negative play, as it is a strong deterrent to players who do not adhere to the Laws. If handled with common sense, the use of cards can also add to the spectacle as it encourages the non-offending teams to play a more expansive game with an extra player on the field, thus creating more opportunity to score and more excitement for the spectator. Conversely, if players are sent off the field incorrectly or too frequently it can lead to an unfair contest that would negatively affect the spectacle by effectively taking one team out of the game. The current method of using cards seems to be working in curbing a certain

amount of foul play but there is a strong feeling, particularly from the media, that more could be done in preventing negative play (professional fouls). The general feeling is that, if anything, more yellow cards could be issued to players or teams who repeatedly offend or commit fouls to prevent the opposition from gaining possession when their try line is under threat.

Consistency:

Referring to a project entitled 'Competencies of Rugby Referees' written by Scott Dickson for the University of New England, one area of refereeing performance requiring greater prominence in training and development programs is the "*consistent application of laws during a game"*. At the higher levels of the game the assessment process has gone some way in bringing more consistency but referees are still hindered by the laws and the actual dynamics of a match situation. It is found, even at Test level, that situations arise in matches where either side are liable to penalty. It is how the referee perceives the incident in a split second that determines which way the call will go. The Laws, particularly at the tackle and ruck, are too 'grey' to determine with a high level of consistency, even for the top ranked referee. Rod Macqueen writes in 'The Australian Rugby Companion': *" The other anomaly stifling the game is the inconsistency of interpretation at the breakdown and tackle. Strictly speaking, in normal passages of play you could penalize teams either way at every breakdown".* This frustration was echoed by most of those interviewed for this project and it seems that the laws governing tackle/ ruck situations require alteration or simplification to achieve consistency. Consistency in the game in different countries has improved. However, the media people interviewed were unanimous in suggesting that Northern Hemisphere referees have some catching up to do. This is obviously an issue for the IRB to address and, as mentioned above, the assessment process has gone some way to address this. This process, however, has tended to hinder referees in officiating an open and flowing game and therefore still requires development to achieve the desired result.

Continuity:

The Laws of the Game again play a large part in affecting this aspect of the game. Continuity in play emerged as an area of concern and criticism among those interviewed. It seems something needs to be done in this regard to create a more attractive product. The major factor affecting continuity in a match is constant and unnecessary **stoppages** in play. It appears there are a number of factors that create these stoppages:

- **Complicated Laws**- Laws that are confusing (for players and referees) or too difficult for the referee to administer - the dynamics of the game situation conflict with promoting continuity using the current laws.
- **Pedantic referees-** referees who find too many reasons to blow their whistle - referees who referee too strictly to the Laws

- **Players not complying with Laws-** either players not understanding the Laws, lacking the skill necessary or being not prepared to play within them. Negative play and professional fouls fall under this heading.
- **Advantage-** When referees don't look for advantage or, conversely, play advantage for too long - then stop the game and bring play back for an earlier infringement. The 'Advantage issue' can be addressed through referee coaching and referees' individual experience and knowledge (feel for the game).
- **Injuries-** As previously mentioned**,** with safety being top priority, the referee has no option but to stop the game at certain times. What should be strongly discouraged are teams or players who feign injury to prevent the opposition gaining momentum. Statistics show that certain teams consistently force injury stoppages at crucial times in games. Perhaps the citing process should be extended to warn and, if necessary, penalize teams that continue this trend.
- **'Dead' time during the game-** When considering actual playing time in sports like AFL or Soccer, Rugby compares relatively poorly. While these sports have the ball in play for relatively long periods, Rugby has more numerous and time-consuming breaks in play. The time taken for a kick at goal for example can take up to a minute of playing time while teams which delay the formation of lineouts and scrums also contribute to loss of game time. Here again cooperation between players and officials is important as well as a few minor alterations to how time is kept during major matches. There is a strong feeling that the playing clock should be stopped more regularly. The responsibility for keeping time for all professional games should be taken out of the hands of the referees and should rest with an official timekeeper. The referee should still signal time on and off, as they currently do, but the timekeeper should have the power to stop and start the clock at times agreed in the competition rules. One example for when the clock could be stopped is at kicks at goal. Perhaps this could extend to all penalties, with the clock being stopped when the penalty is awarded and then started again when the ball is back in play - i.e. after it has been kicked. This would logically extend the running length of the game. However, as a professional sport, a standard game of Rugby is significantly shorter that say AFL, Cricket, American Football, Basketball and Baseball. A longer game also means more product to sell - meaning advertising around the ground on players clothing and the field itself is exposed for longer.

Not all of the points listed above can be addressed by referees and law-makers- there is a need to work with Unions, players and coaches throughout the Rugby playing world to promote continuity and positive play from the lowest level upwards. We cannot have situations where players arrive at the top level of the game only to be burdened with an expectation that they were

never aware existed. The old cliché 'winning isn't everything…it's how you play the game' should still have some relevance at all levels of the game. After all, Rugby is required to be played in the spirit of the Laws of the Game.

3. THE PREPARATION OF REFEREES

To referee at the highest level, referees are required to be **physically** and **mentally** prepared for the speed and pressures of the modern game. Furthermore, as they represent their countries, there is an expectation for them to be well presented **off the field.** They have an ambassadorial role for both their country, and the Game. Referees often have to travel great distances and to different countries to do their job so it is necessary for them to be prepared for physical and mental requirements that are associated with this lifestyle. Everything from dealing with the travel and press interviews to hostile fans needs to be considered. It is necessary for referees to look and act the part on an off the field but how should they prepare?

Physical Preparation

From accounts by referees and players involved at the highest level, the modern game of Rugby Union is faster than it was a few years ago. In the past referees could perhaps get away with minimal physical preparation. However, as the game has become more professional, it has become necessary for referees to train more like professionals. The appearance of an overweight and out-of-breath referee does nothing to enhance the image of a fast and attractive sport. Referees are not only required to be fit but must also appear to be fit, to form part of the overall package. This approach not only assists the referee in getting around the field but also gives the impression that the game is being handled by a professional who is prepared to train like one. The age of the referee should not matter, if he is fit, fast and athletic he will be able to keep pace with the game. One only has to look at the example of the Rugby League referee Bill Harrigan who, at 43, is still the best referee in that code. He is not only fit and fast enough to keep up with play but looks like a well-trained athlete. Professional referees will obviously have the time and input from specialists to assist them with physical preparation. However, considering there are only 5 full-time professional referees in the country it is imperative that 'fringe' and up-and-coming referees are exposed to trainers and programs to get them to a competitive level. These programs should not only include strength, stamina and speed training but also recovery training and diet management.

Mental Preparation

An aspect of professional sport recognized as an area of strength across most Australian sports is mental preparation. People often refer to Australian sports people as being 'mentally tough' and

'focused', contributing to their sporting successes in recent years. This is no different when considering refereeing at the top level. It doesn't matter how fit and athletic a referee may be, without control and understanding of his role on the field he will not be able to officiate competently at the top level. The referee needs to be confident, accurate and focused throughout the game. He needs to develop techniques to assist in controlling his 'psych' levels while remaining motivated between games and seasons. Sport Psychology programs and techniques have and will continue to play a substantial role in professional Rugby and therefore need to be available and accessible to referees.

The ARU has recognized both physical and mental preparation in the training of elite referees. These programs require constant refinement to produce relevant information that keeps pace with the Game and how it is developing.

4.THE LAWS OF THE GAME

From the interviews completed for this project as well as informal discussions with people both inside and outside of Rugby circles a few aspects of the Game have repeatedly been singled out for criticism. These criticisms often relate to the Laws of the Game as written. Below are few Laws that surfaced as being in need of attention:

- Tackle
- Ruck
- Maul
- Advantage
- Offside
- Obstruction
- Scrum

The Tackle:

The Tackle Law, or rather the outcomes arising from the Law, are seen as a major drawback to Rugby's potential of attracting more spectators. It is also a major cause of frustration to players, coaches and referees. The Law as written is often in conflict with what the players are trying to achieve on the field. Often players find themselves being penalized for doing something they have been coached to do. Why does this happen? The main reason, as I see it, is that there is such a fine line between players carrying out an option correctly and being penalized for trying to do so. Two penalty offences immediately spring to mind, firstly the tackled player (player on the ground) is penalized for 'holding on' and secondly the 'legal' defending player (on his feet and

from the correct side) is penalized for 'hands in ruck' (after an arriving attacking player binds on him creating the ruck). The lack of time between the tackled player releasing, defending player picking up and the ruck being formed is at the core of the problem. There is often not enough time to accurately determine who was at fault or when were they at fault. Each game at every level consistently has at least half a dozen of these 50/50 penalty calls. This is unacceptable for a sport that should be won and lost by the actions of players and not those of the referee. Mending this problem is a project in its own right but here are a few suggestions for cleaning up this facet of the game.

- **Simplify the Law** so that players, referees and spectators can more easily understand it.
- **The tackled player should place the ball away from his body** (perhaps at arm's length)- this would open up the tackle area with the ball now clearly away from the player on the ground. By placing the ball away from his body the tackler is less likely to be penalized for 'holding on' as the ball would no longer be caught up by his arms, legs etc. The notion that the game is played by players on their feet would be reinforced by not allowing the player on the ground to shield the ball from the opposition against his body. It would also allow the defending team a clear 'crack' at the ball.
- **Create offside lines at the tackle as per the ruck/ maul** - this would ensure returning defending players must be put on side before playing the ball or making a tackle. This would encourage the pick and drive from the attacking team and possibly create more continuity in play. It would also deter 'lazy runners' from disrupting quick ball from the base of the tackle. The tackle should be deemed over once the ball is moved beyond the imaginary 1m radius from the tackle. The lazy runners mentioned above would never have been onside thus could only take part again once the pass receiver has run 5m with the ball or passed the ball to a teammate (much like offside from a kick in general play).
- **Tackler to get on side before playing on**- As the Law is currently written, the tackler may approach the ball from the attacking side after the tackle. This can be confusing when it happens as it appears a player is offside before playing the ball and, given that this rarely happens during a game there is nothing preventing all defending players from approaching the ball from the defending goal-line or at least to step over the ball in the case of the tackler.

Ruck:

Some of the problems created in the ruck have been highlighted in the previous paragraph on the tackle (hands in ruck penalty). It is fair to say that most players have little idea of what constitutes a ruck and what they can and can't do when a ruck is formed. This has arisen out of the dynamics of bodies coming together, all trying their best to gain possession, and Laws that seem to relate to play at a slower pace than that currently played. The fact that some rucks only last a few seconds

means players' rights will change in the same space of time. An example can be described as follows: the ball is on the ground (perhaps placed there by a tackled player), a defending player arrives in an attempt to gain possession, an attacking player binds to this defending player to prevent him from getting to the ball and to effect a 'clean out'. While the players are in contact over the ball a ruck is formed and no players may play the ball with their hands, once the attacking player drives the defending player back off the ball the ruck is over and players may once again play the ball with their hands. Now consider that all this happens within a few seconds. Sounds confusing, doesn't it? Another problem suitable for a project in its own right, here are a few suggestions for cleaning up this phase of play.

- **Player (on feet) with hands on ball before or simultaneous with ruck formation should be allowed to continue:** If a player is good enough to get to the ball before opposition he should be rewarded for his positive play and ability. Also the reality of the situation is that once a player has his hands on the opposition's ball he is unlikely to release it once <u>somebody</u> binds onto him (he wouldn't know who it is binding to him as he would more than likely be looking down in securing possession). The onus will then shift to the attacking team to effect a 'clean out' or lose possession; again emphasis would be placed on the player's skills, coaching and strength in effecting this 'clean out'.
- **Team in possession to use hands:** Once possession has clearly been won at the ruck the team in possession should be allowed to use their hands to move the ball to the halfback to keep the game moving more swiftly.
- **Strict on players attacking the halfback:** The ball should be clearly out of the ruck before the ruck is deemed over. The idea that the ball is out when the halfback touches it is flawed as the ball is sometimes stuck in the ruck and requires the player to pull it out. Players involved in the ruck should not be allowed to tackle or interfere with the halfback- no slapping his arms or knocking the ball out of his hands etc.
- **Offside at ruck:** offside around the fringes of the ruck should be strictly dealt with. This applies mainly to the defending players but should also apply to those on the attacking team who effectively obstruct the opposition while standing in front of the last feet in the ruck.
- **Player education:** Players must understand what constitutes a ruck and their respective rights at that phase.
- **Consistency in referees call:** Referees often call out to players informing them that a ruck has formed. This call should be standardized throughout the rugby world so that all players understand what the referee is telling them. An example would be for the referee to call out 'ruck' or 'ruck formed' at the appropriate time.

Maul:

Another feature unique to Rugby is the maul; it incorporates overall body strength and includes technique and teamwork. Two areas of concern when considering the maul are: the **formation of the maul** and **obstruction** during a maul.

As per the 'tackle', players don't always know when a **maul** has **formed**. This confusion can be seen at the lineout. Once the opposition jumper has clearly won possession; the defending player who immediately tackles jumper on landing is sometimes penalized for pulling down the maul. To the letter of the law this is correct as the jumper is being bound to by a teammate (who just supported his jump) and once the tackler effects the tackle (binds onto the jumper) a maul has formed. This situation could also occur in open play effectively preventing the defender from making the tackle. Common sense tells us that players should be allowed to tackle the opposition player in possession.

Regarding **obstruction** in the maul- the way in which the maul can be an effective screen for a ball carrier at its back is in conflict with a fair contest for the ball. The players in front of the maul are effectively obstructing the opposition from ball carrier.

Here follow a few suggestions regarding the maul:

- **Maul forming sequence:** A subtle amendment to the law could state that a maul is only formed if a defending player binds <u>first</u> to the player in possession, thus giving the defending player the right to effect a tackle on the pre-bound, ball carrying opponent/s.
- **Consistency in referees call:** As discussed under the 'ruck' above, the referee's call (for a maul being formed) should be standardized. An example could be 'maul' or 'maul formed'.
- **Discourage the loosely bond ball carrier:** This relates to the player in possession at the back of the maul, loosely bound, using it as a shield from the opposition. This not only looks odd but contrasts with how the game is played in almost all other phases (where there is a 'fair contest for the ball'). The referee should tell the player to 'play it', meaning he should either break off from the maul or pass the ball to other player.

Advantage:

A topic of lengthy debate among referees, the Advantage Law is seen as important and almost sacred to those who officiate the game. The biggest debate is; 'when is advantage over'? There have been suggestions that after a specific number of passes or phases the advantage should be called off. However this, in a game situation, is unrealistic as every situation is different from the next and should be treated as such. There is strong agreement however that referees should retain their control over when advantage has been gained. Some suggestions for how referees should approach this Law:

- **Referees encouraged to 'make the decision'**- referees should look to play advantage at every opportunity but must be mindful that decisions are required once advantage is being played. A decision is required as to the likelihood of an advantage being gained and a decision is required as to when advantage has been gained. Referees should make their decision earlier rather than later so that the offending team is not kept 'out' of the game for too long a period. If there is little likelihood of advantage being gained the referee should stop the game and award the scrum, penalty or free kick to the non-offending team. Conversely, advantage (especially at the highest levels) could be gained almost instantly through mere possession of the football, in which case the referee should call 'advantage over', allowing the non-offending team into the game.
- **No further advantage after drop goal attempt-** what has happened in recent times is that teams, once they realize they have a penalty advantage in their favor, attempt a drop goal with the knowledge that, if unsuccessful, they will get the penalty. One could argue this practice is stretching the advantage Law and in effect giving a 'second bite of the cherry'. Naturally the referee must consider how much pressure the kicker is under before attempting the kick. If the referee decides the kicker had a fair chance of scoring that should be his advantage.
- **Consider the time a player has to exercise his options-** Much the same as the drop-goal attempt only relating to a kick in general play. If the kicker is under little pressure and has time to assess his options then kicks the ball directly into touch, one could say he gained advantage due their possession of the football and their position on the field. This should relate more to scrum advantage than penalty advantage.
- **Different signal/ call for different advantage-** this relates to a scrum advantage as compared with a penalty advantage. The referee may play a different advantage for a penalty offence compared with a mistake that would result in a scrum. The referee's signal and call should perhaps differ when indicating the different advantage. An example of a change in signal could be: instead of holding his arm out parallel to the ground he could raise it slightly or even hold it above his head for a penalty advantage, thereby distinguishing it from the scrum advantage signal. He could also call out what type of offence when calling advantage to the players e.g. 'knock-on advantage' or 'penalty advantage'.

Offside:

Offside play can have a major impact on the spectacle of the game with offending players often restricting the space for the opposition to exercise their options. The result is that the continuity of the game is affected, making for an unattractive product. Some suggestions for this facet of the game:

- **Players should be clearly on-side**- players should have their entire bodies behind the offside line and not just their feet as is currently the case. Players lurking on the fringes of the offside line, particularly around the ruck, cause major disruption to the flow of the game. They attack the scrum half before he has time to clear the ball and limit the space around the breakdown area for potential attacking plays. It should be the responsibility of these players to be clearly on side (whole body behind the last feet) or be liable to penalty. The touch judges should also play a greater role in informing referees about offside players. Once the players understand that they will not get away with this practice they will soon stop offending or be cautioned, thereby giving the opposition the advantage of an extra player on the field.
- **Ground (turf) preparation to assist-** soccer fields for major games have patterns cut into the grass to assist the lineman in determining offside, there is no reason why rugby fields can't have their grass cut in a similar fashion. Bands (of say 5m) running across the field parallel with the goal lines would negate the officials' error of Parallax. This would also assist the far-side touch judge in marking out 10m from the lineout for the defending backs.
- **Offside with no effect…play on**- if a player is in an offside position but has no effect on the opposition and their use of the ball, play should be allowed to continue.

Obstruction:

Referees and touch judges should be alert to obstruction on the field but should also take into account what effect the obstruction has had on the opposition. An example of this could be seen in a Test Match this year where a player was penalized for obstruction when the ball was nowhere near him, the exciting back line movement that ended in a 'try' was called back and a penalty awarded to the opposition. People's interest in the Game does not revolve around penalties being awarded but rather to see athletes exhibiting their attractive skills and teamwork. This approach should also apply when considering **decoy runners.** Decoy runners attract defenders and create space for their teammates creating more potential for open running rugby. If decoy runners are used correctly (not realistically obstructing the opposition) they should be seen as a positive initiative from the team in possession.

Scrum:

As an integral part of Rugby, the scrum should never be altered to the extent that its competitive nature is removed altogether, it is however a phase of play that most people don't appreciate and it seems to have little effect on attracting new spectators to the Game. The scrum does however create positions for certain body types and in that way will attract players who's physical makeup is not be well suited for many other sports. It's not only the fact that it caters for a certain body

type that makes the scrum important, it is often the 'foundation' or 'platform' of the physical contact between the teams and requires the players involved to be powerful and technically skilled. The major drawback to the scrum is the number of **resets** in a game. They are often the result of a collapse or 'pop'(safety), a wheel or an unsteady platform. These resets slow the game down accounting for 'dead time' during the match. While the tight forwards might be enjoying themselves not many others share in their enjoyment of multiple scrums, it is necessary for the referee to manage this aspect of the game to reduce the number of resets. Suggestions for cutting down of scrum resets:

- **The referee must take action:** whether it is through management or penalties the referee must take action to prevent numerous resets in a game.
- **Players must understand their responsibilities:** The front row forwards must understand their role in the game, they have the required skills to play in these unique position and should understand the responsibility that goes with it.
- **Caution the players (last option)**: If the original set of front row forwards are not able to sort the problems out themselves, have them temporarily replaced for 10 minutes. This should be the last option for the referee (after management and penalty) but should be an option non-the less.

The scrum is an integral part of Rugby and every effort should be made to develop it into an enjoyable or at least interesting spectacle.

7- CONCLUSION

The game of Rugby and its Laws are constantly evolving, making this project relevant for the season 2003 and perhaps a few years thereafter. It will hopefully be outdated in time. I say hopefully as, if many of the issues discussed in this project are still relevant in ten years, the game of Rugby will perhaps have gone backwards from where it is today. Rugby should look to retain its tradition and heritage however it also has to continue to evolve and keep pace with what the market demands to remain competitive. To successfully sell the sport, the public must feel that they are being entertained, that they are getting value for their money and that Rugby offers them something that can't be found in other sports. It is up to the marketers to sell the sport to the public but its up to the players, the officials and the law-makers to ensure the product that is being sold is of the highest quality. To ensure the Game's continued success and growth in the coming years it is up to the players, coaches, officials and marketers to co-operate in producing the finest and most attractive **package** possible.

END

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