

# Global Law Trials 2017

World Rugby (formerly the International Rugby Board) has adopted a number of law trials which will come into force in northern hemisphere rugby **from 1 August 2017** and will last for an initial period of one year. Some of these trials are already in force in the southern hemisphere and, indeed, were applied during the British & Irish Lions tour. However, some of the trials – see particularly the changes to the ruck designed to counter the Italy “only a tackle” tactic which enlivened the England-Italy 6 Nations match – are more recent and will not apply in the southern hemisphere until 1 January 2018. They will all apply to the new season in England, starting with our pre-season friendly against Kirkby Lonsdale on 12 August.

Full information, together with explanatory videos, is available at the World Rugby website [www.laws.worldrugby.org/?domain=20](http://www.laws.worldrugby.org/?domain=20) under the heading Global Law Trials 2017 but, by way of a taster, they are summarised below: -

## Penalty Infringements

1. If a penalty is awarded after the end of normal half or full time, the ball may now be kicked into touch and a line-out awarded, with play continuing until the ball next becomes dead. This is intended to allow the non-offending team the same attacking options as they would have had before the end of normal time. To end the half, the ball must first be tapped and only then kicked into touch.
2. If a penalty try is awarded for foul play, the conversion is automatically awarded without a kick at goal, making a foul play penalty try worth 7 points.
3. If the referee is playing advantage for multiple penalty infringements, the non-offending team may choose the most advantageous of the penalty marks.

## Ruck/Tackle

1. Whereas under current law the tackler may play the ball from any position once back on his feet, the trial will require the tackler to come “through the gate” as is required of all other players.
2. The definition of a ruck is amended to apply where there is a single player (attacker or defender) on his feet over the ball at a tackle (tackler and ball carrier on the ground). The offside line at the back foot of the ruck is therefore created before an opponent engages. This is clearly designed to stop the situation exploited by Italy against England that, if there is only a tackle and no engaged ruck, there is no off-side line. Determining when a player not in contact is “over the ball” is likely to cause confusion, particularly as the explanatory video shows a player “bridging” over the ball, with weight on his hands, which is itself illegal.... Also, the first player to arrive, even though he now single-handedly forms a ruck, is still able to pick the ball up before an opponent makes contact.
3. A player may not kick the ball out of a ruck, only hook it backwards with a foot.

## Scrum

1. Under the new trial, the scrum half must put the ball in “straight” – now, where have I read that before? – but will now be allowed to stand not in the middle of the tunnel, but with a shoulder aligned to the tunnel – i.e. half a body’s width towards his own side.

2. There is now to be a requirement that the side putting the ball in MUST strike for the ball even though, with the apparent acceptance of crooked feeds, there is often little need for this.
3. Uncontested scrums must be formed of eight players per team.

### **Ball Out of Play**

1. A number of changes are introduced to stop the situation where a player standing outside the playing area picks up the ball from infield so that it is deemed to be out of play. Instead, any situation where the player is in touch, in-goal or touch-in-goal and gathers a ball which has not crossed the plane of the relevant line will be deemed to have taken the ball out himself.
2. Conversely, if a player jumps to knock the ball back into the playing area, the ball remains in play irrespective of whether the ball had crossed the line of touch and irrespective of whether the player lands in touch or back in the field of play.

Some of these changes are fairly logical and will speed up play whereas others clearly pose significant challenges to referees and players alike. The scrum put-in change would be unnecessary if the existing law were applied, so it will be interesting to see whether the trial restores competition at the put-in; while the limitations on the tackler's ability to challenge for the ball and the new definition of a ruck seem to take us further down the road towards rugby league, with the tackle potentially becoming almost like a play-the-ball.

There will be a number of roadshows for coaches and referees so these issues will get an airing before the season starts, but be ready for some uncertainty as the players and referees get to grips with the changes.