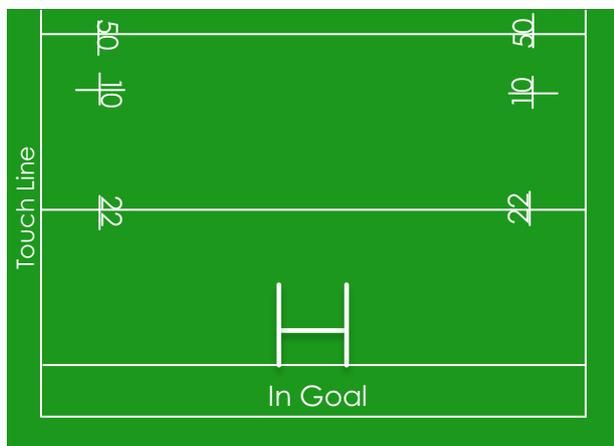


Rugby

The sport of rugby football is a thrilling one, featuring rapid-fire passing, nonstop action, and the sounds of heads crashing together. In 2019 Japan hosted the Rugby World Cup, and will host rugby once again at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. It will be the second time that rugby sevens has been featured at the Olympic Games. In light of that, I would like to explore the basic rules and highlights of rugby, as well as the teams and athletes aiming for glory in Tokyo.



Rugby's origins lie in soccer. The story goes that in the first half of the 18th century, an athlete decided to pick up the ball during a soccer match and run into the goal, thus creating rugby. In the second half of the 18th century, rules were created and rugby became an official sport. It first spread through England, and then to Europe, New Zealand and Australia. In the 1900 Olympic Games 15-man rugby was featured as an official event, and continued to be an Olympic event until 1924. Rugby wouldn't appear again until the 2016 Rio Olympics, where it was held in the form of rugby sevens.



Rugby is played on a 100-meter by 70-meter "pitch." 15-man rugby is played across two 40-minute halves, while rugby sevens is just two short 7-minute halves. Rugby, similar to ice hockey, features long periods of action with no pauses.

Each match begins with a kickoff. When the ball is kicked, it must first be bounced on the ground. Once the ball is in play, there are two basic ways to move the ball across the field. The first is to run with the ball, and the second is to kick the ball. In this case, known as a punt, it is not necessary to bounce the ball first.

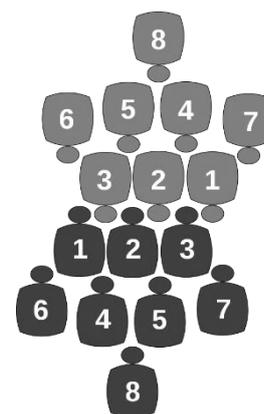
In rugby, you are not allowed to pass the ball in the forward direction. If you do, it results in a penalty. Even dropping the ball in front of yourself is a violation.

The simplest way to stop the offense from moving across the field is to tackle them. Tackling a player who is not holding the ball is a violation. Sometimes you may see a player

being held standing by three or more defenders fighting for the ball. This is known as a maul. When players fight for a ball that has fallen to the ground, it is known as a ruck.

When the ball crosses the touch-line (see chart above,) it is considered a lineout. When a lineout occurs, the players on both teams line up, and the non-offending team throws the ball back into play. In order to catch the ball, players will lift each other into the air. This is the image that many people associate with rugby.

One more common play in rugby is the scrum. After a minor penalty, 8 players from each team, or 3 in the case of sevens, line up facing each other in a pre-determined formation. The non-offending team then puts the ball into the scrum, and both teams fight for the ball. In the case of more severe penalties, the non-offending team is given the choice between a penalty kick and a scrum.



The formation used in a "scrum"

There are four main methods of scoring in rugby. The method that results in the most points is the "try," where the offence carries the ball into the opponent's in goal area. This results in 5 points. When a try is scored, the scoring team also gets a chance to kick a conversion kick for an extra 2 points. During play if a player bounces the ball on the ground and proceeds to kick it through the goal posts, it is known as a drop goal, which is worth 3 points. The final method, penalty kicks, are also awarded 3 points.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics will feature men's and women's rugby sevens. The 12 best teams from around the world will compete in the Tokyo Stadium. Of those 12, 11 have been determined at the time of this article. 2016 champions Fiji, silver medalist England, and finally South Africa, who defeated Japan in the bronze medal match, will all make an appearance. New Zealand, who rules the 15-man rugby world, has also secured its qualification. New Zealand lost to Japan in the first round at the Rio Olympics. On the women's side, 10 teams have been determined. The winners in Rio, Australia, second-place New Zealand, and third-place Canada have all secured their qualification. The Japanese squad "sakura sevens," who finished 10th in Rio, will look to show their growth as a team, and fight for their first medal.

The men's squad will most certainly be looking to get revenge for their 4th place finish in Rio. One contender for the men's squad is Toyohashi local and Rio 2016 Olympian Masakatsu Hikosaka. Let's show him and all the Japanese athletes our full support!