

## **NUTS & BOLTS OF A ROOKIE TAG REFEREE:**

### **Step 1 – Introduction to TAG?**

Tag Rugby is a fun, fast and skillful sport. Tag is a ‘**soft contact**’ game, where there is no reckless or deliberate contact allowed! Successful referees will always be able to control players by eliminating dangerous rough play for the enjoyment of all on-field players. Before any new Tag Referee begins their journey, it is paramount to acknowledge and understand that **CONTACT will not be permitted** on the Tag field which makes this sport so enjoyable for male and female players to play equally and safely together!

The ITRA uses the slogan “***Run @ spaces, not faces!***” to encourage players to be more careful and avoid contact. Consider quoting this during your matches.

The most popular social leagues are played equally by male and female players; in ‘Mixed Teams’. There are two teams of 7-a-side, with a maximum of 14 players on the field. The minimum number of players on a mixed tag team is five (5). There can only be a maximum of four (4) male players on the pitch at once, but there can be up to the limit of seven (7) female players on a team at once.

Male players who score a try receive 1 point, and female players who score a try receive 3 points! This extra scoring system helps to promote maximum participation between all players on a Mixed Tag Team. It works very well, and greatly improves inclusivity!

There is a ‘bonus box’ located in the middle of each team’s try line (5m wide x 3m deep). Anybody can score in that bonus box, but only FEMALE players will be awarded one (1) bonus point. So, if a female Tag player scores in the bonus box, they automatically get three (3) points + one (1) additional bonus point = four (4) points to their teams score. The bonus box can be entered from all sides.

The only specific equipment a Tag player needs is ‘official Tag shorts’ and appropriate footwear for the pitch surface (grass or all weather synthetic astro). The Tag shorts will have a velcro patch on both sides of the hips. Every Tag player will receive a pair (2) of Tags to stick on to their shorts. Typically, one team will have pink Tags and the other team yellow Tags to help distinguish players (especially if not wearing a uniform shirt).

The objective of the game is to ground the ball over the opponent's try line to score tries. The player in possession of the ball may run, kick or pass the ball attempting to get further downfield and cross the opponent's try line. The pass must be made either in a sideways or backwards direction from one player to another.

It is the objective of the team without the ball, i.e. the "defenders" to prevent this by removing one or both "Tags" from the ball carriers tag shorts. The "Tag" removes the 'tackle' or contact situation away from the game, making it unique and so appealing to male & female players in Mixed Tag Teams.

The attacking team has a full "set" of six Tags or plays (lives) to use the possession to score a try. The opposition will have to defend that "set". Both the attacking & defending "set" consists of six "tags" or "plays" to place the ball on or over the defending team's try line to score a try. After six "tags" (completed set) a changeover occurs, and the defending team then becomes the attacking team.

A Tag match is two x 20 minute halves with a 5 minute half-time period. So, each Tag match is a total of 45 minutes duration.

## **Step 2 – Pre-match Set-Up**

When an ITRA Referee arrives down to their venue, 30 minutes before their appointed kick-off time to allow plenty of time to get set-up and organized.

An ITRA referee needs to already have their official ITRA uniform, correct footwear for pitch surface, wristwatch, whistle, score card holder case and pencil to mark their score card correctly!

They will check-in with their ITRA Venue Manager. The referee's duty pre-match is to mark out their Tag pitch with coloured cones, collect their official match score cards, a ball and two sets of match Tags (7 pairs of pink / 7 pairs of yellow Tags)

## **Step 3 – Meeting & Greeting the Team Captains**

You will walk on to the field and politely call over the captains of the two opposing teams. Introduce yourself and ask the names of each captain and get them to introduce each other. It is a good idea at this stage to ask "*what standard and level of Tag experience does each team have?*" In other words, are there any complete beginners playing? This will give you an indication of the standard and if you need to explain more of the laws and tactics of Tag as

the match progresses. Typically, the most difficult scenario is when you have a beginner team with little Tag experience up against a very experienced, well organized, and competitive Tag team. This obviously causes huge imbalance and can make it tricky to referee!

You will ask each team to choose which colour Tags they want. Best practice is to match the tags with the colour of the uniform where applicable (pink shirts get pink tags, so you can call “advantage Pink team” etc).

The captains shall toss for choice of ends. The ITRA team capt toss is the ‘Rock / Paper / Scissors’ game. The captain winning the toss has both the choice of which direction to run and which team will use a place kick from the center of the field to start the game.

Finally, this is your time to ask each team captain if they have any specific questions for you? You can give them a polite heads-up as to what you would like / expect from the teams on your pitch, e.g. “no back chat to ref” “zero contact allowed, so no rough play please!” etc

#### **Step 4 – THE TAG MATCH – Nuts & Bolts for Rookie Refs**

To start the match, the team which has chosen to kick-off gets the ball. In mixed Tag, a female player takes all KO to start the match. Place the ball on the half-way line. You the ref will stand 10m back on the receiving team’s side of the pitch and to one side (not in direct line of the kick where possible).

The Venue Manager sounds the siren to start all the games in the first round at the same time on a synchronized timing system. You check your watch and start your stopwatch to keep your own time as back-up. You then blow your whistle to start your Tag match.

To help explain; we will make the team kicking off the PINK team and the team waiting to receive the ball the YELLOW team. The female player on the pink team will kick off, with the ball travelling the required 10m distance forward.

It is important to note that in general play with TAG, the referee will always be standing on the defending team’s side & facing the attacking team with the ball who will be running towards you the referee. Therefore, you will be doing a lot of running backwards, forwards, backwards, forwards in multiple ‘shuttle’ type situations.

When the ball has travelled the required 10m distance, you will run backwards towards the pinks (kicking team) and will now be facing the yellows (receiving

team) who will have possession.

Now play has started, the attacking yellow player who is on-side can run with the ball. The attacking player always has three options in general play; a) run, b) pass the ball (either sideways or backwards – but NOT forwards) or c) kick it in any direction (but the kick is called a ‘grubber kick’ and the ball must hit the ground and bounce first, before going higher than you the referees shoulder height!).

The pink defensive team will run up to “TAG” the yellow player with the ball. You will be just one step behind the yellow team and slightly to one side of the approaching pink player for better vision.

The yellow player will run to avoid being “Tagged” and the pink team will try to remove one or both tags to prevent him/her from running with the ball, kicking, or passing the ball to his/her teammates (it does not make a difference if 1 or 2 tags are removed). The yellow team can advance forward so long as the player with the ball still has both tags attached to their shorts.

As soon as the yellow player is “Tagged” by pinks, you the referee will call “Tag 1 yellows”. The pink defending player holds the Tag in the air and stands on the ‘mark’ directly where the Tag was made, this defending pink player is now referred to as the “MARKER”. The yellow player with the ball, must come back to where the marker is standing.

Typical problems:

A) the attacking player accidentally or deliberately blocks their Tag/s with their hand or the ball when a defender is trying to remove their Tag (Referee specifically watch the area around the Tags for any interference on the Tags, sanction is a Penalty).

B) The attacking players shirt is loose and hanging out over the shorts covering the Tags (Referee must constantly be watching for shirts out, warning players and the sanction is a Penalty against the person).

C) The attacking player jumps in the air to avoid being Tagged (Referee make sure that attacking player always has one foot on the ground when a defender is within Tagging distance, sanction is a Penalty)

D) The defending player throws the yellow Tag away after removing it (Inform the defending “Marker” not to throw away the Tags, but to hold them and give back to opposition attacking player, warn them that it is not to be repeated, sanction is a Penalty if repeated. This is a BIG problem in very windy conditions where the Tags get blown off the pitch and cause big delays).

E) The defending player walks forwards away from the spot where the “Mark” was made, in an attempt to gain ground and an advantage (call the defending

player back and point out where the “Mark” should be, warn them that it is not to be repeated, sanction is a Penalty if repeated)

Now you have called “Tag 1 yellow”. Your priority is to immediately get into position quickly. You will jog backwards to 7m from where the defending pink “Marker” is standing. The remaining 6 pink players must get back in a flat defensive line with you, fully 7m from the Play-The-Ball (PTB).

Now the Play-The-Ball (PTB) situation. This is THE most important part of Tag as it is the most common way for a Tag Team to re-start play after every single Tag and it will occur over 100 times in a game. So, if you do not have a clean & controlled PTB every time, it will negatively impact on the standard of your match and your ability to referee the game! Please read the following steps to successfully control the PTB for both teams (if the PTB does not work out during the early part of the game, you need to stop both teams and eradicate the mistakes! Please do not be afraid to blow your whistle and ask both teams to re-set and do the PTB again correctly, with you the Referee explaining and even demonstrating to the players!)

Typically, a PTB is awarded for any of the following actions:

- Ball is passed in a forward direction
- The ball is dropped forward on the ground from the hands
- A player or the ball has gone out over the side touchline
- An attacking player is “Tagged” over the opposition try line before grounding the ball.
- A simple ‘changeover’ after “Six Tags” are completed

The PTB is basically when the A player (has not re-attached their Tags) puts the ball flat on the ground, with the ball facing sideways. They use one foot to gently roll the ball backwards along the ground to their Dummy Half using the point of their foot (it is easier to use the toes & not the heel). The ball should not be kicked hard or hacked backwards. It is a gentle motion. This will be clearly explained and demonstrated at our Referee Practical Coaching Phase later.

- Defending player is called (D) removes a Tag from attacking player called (A)
- D becomes the Marker, and stands on the spot where the Tag was removed, they must hold the Tag/s
- Player A must stop running forwards and come back to where the Marker is standing. Player A will have the ball and stands directly in front of the Marker, but one full step back and away from Marker.
- So, we now have two players at the PTB: one Marker and one A

- (attacking ball player) standing 1m / 1 step directly apart)
- The third player at the PTB is the attacking “Dummy Half” player (DH). The DH stands directly behind (not to the side) of their fellow A player at the PTB.
  - At this point the Marker does not hand the Tag/s back to the A player. The priority is to get the ball moving at the PTB to allow continuity. So, player A will PTB as quickly as possible without any deliberate delays.
  - Once the ball is played by A, the Marker must allow the DH to pick up the ball. The DH now have 3 seconds in which to pick up the ball. Please note that the Marker + the whole DEFENSIVE LINE cannot move until the DH touches the ball within 3 seconds!
  - Once the DH picks up the ball, he/she can now run, pass, or kick the ball. Please note that the DH can pick up the ball with LESS than two Tags attached, so long as he/she does not take more than 1 step with the ball (this is the exception to the rule to keep the game flowing)
  - Once the ball is played by A, and the DH has touched it, player A can now take their Tags from the Marker and re-attach to shorts. The ball is live and in general play.

If the attacking yellow team get Tagged again, the Referee calls “Tag 2 yellow”. The same PTB situation will be repeated.

You as the Referee will keep the ‘Tag count’ from 1 – 5 Tags, calling out each one (you do not blow the whistle). On the fifth Tag, you will call out “5<sup>th</sup> Tag, last Tag yellow” and using the signal of your arm straight up in the air with all 5 fingers outstretched to signal five Tags gone.

To summarize...each team has a set of six (6) Tags to score a try. If they do not score in their set, you the referee will award a ‘changeover’ of possession to the opposition and they get their ‘set’ of six (6) Tags to try and score. When there is a try, you immediately record the score correctly into the score card for that team.

Apart from the PTB, the other common way to re-start the game is a ‘Penalty tap kick’. This is for more serious offences like, offside, blocking Tags, foul play. The referee stands 10m back in line with the ball, with the 7 defenders flat in line with the referee.

The attacking player must have two Tags attached and they tap the ball against their foot (the ball does not have to leave the hand). The ‘Tag count’ is re-set at zero. Play begins when the ball is tapped against the foot.

The team that scored the try will always re-start play with a kick-off from the middle of the half way line back to the non-scoring team to get possession and make it fair. Female players take the center field KO.

It is the responsibility of BOTH the attacking and defending teams to always avoid contact. ***“Run @ spaces, not faces!”***

### **TROUBLESHOOTING FOR REFEREES:**

Referees should be mindful of allowing play to run as much as possible. Playing lots of ‘advantage’ and always communicating clearly with both teams during play and at the stoppages! One good example of allowing play to continue without unnecessary stoppages is when a defender removes a Tag EXACTLY at the same time as the attacking player passes the ball. The referee should allow play to continue by calling “Play On, simultaneous!” so there is no Tag count, but the attacking player must go back to re-attach their Tag.

At the PTB, a common problem is for the Marker to run around and Tag the DH before he/she has touched the ball (too eager). You need to explain the 3 second rule and make sure the PTB is done correctly.

Referees should watch out for two defenders ‘closing the gap’ on an attacking player, by moving towards each other and deliberately blocking the path of the ball carrier causing unnecessary contact in a ‘sandwich’ type effect. The sanction is a penalty and team warning.

Offside; the defending team’s players must always be back 7m from every PTB (except the Marker) & 10m back from a penalty (whole team) in line with the referee. Watch out for defenders ‘creeping forward’ and trying to gain an advantage without you spotting them. Sanction is a penalty and team warning.

A ‘Late Tag’ is very frustrating for the attacking team. This must not be confused with a simultaneous Tag, which allows “Play On, Simultaneous!” The Tag is taken off the ball carrier well after they have passed or kicked the ball. (if you must think about it...it is probably NOT a late Tag). Sanction is a penalty and team warning.

The only occasion an attacking player can dive, is in the act of scoring a try. An attacking player cannot dive on a loose ball on the ground. Sanction is a

penalty.

The Referee has the power to yellow card an offending player into the 'sin bin' for 5 minutes. This can help to calm down a match that is getting out of control with perhaps one or two players from either the same team or opposing teams disagreeing with each other or your decisions. Try not to wait until it is too late to use your yellow card, with the result that you have unfortunately lost complete control of the game. A good tip is to perhaps call over the team captain of the offending team and ask the captain to "have a word" with the offending player/s or you will have no option but to 'sin bin' them if the matter continues...

Referees must always keep in contact with the ITRA Referee Department and reply quickly to txt and emails about their availability. If you must cancel for something urgent, please try and give a minimum of 48 hours' notice.

Remember this is a job for you and the Referee Dept!

ITRA Referee Mob: 086-3972822

Email: [referee@tagrugby.ie](mailto:referee@tagrugby.ie)

The **"5 ESSENTIALS"** to become a successful ITRA Referee:

1. Always be **FRIENDLY** and **APPROACHABLE** to your Tag players (paying customers)
2. **UNDERSTAND the LAWS of TAG and CONTROL** your match; do NOT allow contact, rough play, or any type of unsporting behaviour on your Tag field.
3. **COMMUNICATE** your refereeing decisions clearly to players and explain / coach the Tag basics to teams where appropriate (beginner teams)
4. **CORRECTLY** and **ACCURATELY RECORD THE SCORES** and **RESULT** of your Tag match
5. Have **FUN** and **ENJOY YOUR TAG MATCH**, if you are positive and enjoying the experience, this will naturally flow into your two teams, resulting in a positive Tag experience for everybody. Please remember, it is not a *World Cup Final* and not a 'win at all costs' situation. Sometimes we need to remind individual players / teams of that.

### Duties of a Tag Referee on the Night:

- 1) Arrive at least 30min before scheduled kick off time.
- 2) Check in with Venue Manager (VM) on arrival at venue to let the VM know your there!
- 3) If you are refereeing in the first round you should be there in plenty of time to mark-out your pitch Mark out your Tag pitch with cones from VM, always make sure that the try line and touch line cones are a safe distance away from barriers (5m) and no dangerous debris (glass, stones, holes) on pitch surface.
- 4) Collect your match score cards, rugby ball, 2 sets of tags. Leave equipment on pitch for next referee/match unless you are last round.
- 5) Ensure you have your official referee shirt, whistle, red and yellow cards, watch, pencil and pen.
- 6) Always fully warm-up and stretch before game.
- 7) 5 minutes before the hooter sounds (3 short blasts), call both teams on to pitch, introduce yourself and check you have the correct teams on the correct pitch, give one set of tags to each team and do toss with captains (Paper-Rock-Scissors). Count "1", "2", "3" and players open their hand, keep going until there is a winner (paper beats rock, rock beats scissors, scissors beats paper), The winning captain gets choice of **both** which direction they will play in the first half and which team will kick off. This is reversed for the second half.
- 8) Safety. Inform both teams that NO jewelry can be worn (watches, rings, bracelets). Shirts must be tucked inside shorts. Prescription sports goggles are allowed (No

spectacles/shades). Baseball caps are permitted but must be worn backwards, with peak against the neck. Soft floppy peaked caps & bucket hats are also permitted. Only official match shorts are allowed.

- 9) Start on hooter (single long blast) and finish at next stoppage after hooter sounds to end 1st half or 2nd half.
- 10) Remember to publicly call out scores to both teams after each try. Take time to correctly mark in scores to avoid errors. Do NOT let teams pressurize you as the referee.
- 11) At the final whistle, call out match score and which team is the winner. Both team captains MUST sign score card
- 12) Make sure 2 full sets of tags and ball are there for next game.
- 13) Do not leave venue without handing back your score cards to VM.
- 14) If you are refereeing last round, the winning tag team collects the cones for the referee.