



To: **Secretaries / Chief Executive Officers of Unions and Regional Associations in Membership of World Rugby**

From: **David Carrigy**
Head of Development & International Relations

Date: **December 14, 2016**

Re: **Law Application Guideline - Contact To The Head**

The World Rugby Executive Committee acting in accordance with Bye-Law 12 agreed to the implementation of the Law Application Guideline relating to the Head as set out in **APPENDIX ONE**.

Supporting example video clips are available through the link below to assist Unions in implementing the Law Application Guideline:

<http://laws.worldrugby.org/guidelines>

World Rugby have created an educational video which will further explain the Law Application Guideline. This video will be replicated in French and Spanish and can be found at the following link:

<https://mab.to/rYURQilAe>

Attached as **APPENDIX TWO** is the press release that will be issued later today. Please keep this Law Application Guideline confidential until you see the press release.

Also attached as **APPENDIX THREE** is a World Rugby Injury Prevention briefing note on head injuries.

The World Rugby Executive Committee confirmed the the Law Application Guideline relating to the Head will have effect from **January 3, 2017**.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Carrigy".

David Carrigy
Head of Development & International Relations



APPENDIX ONE

Reckless Tackle

A player is deemed to have made reckless contact during a tackle or attempted tackle or during other phases of the game if in making contact, the player knew or should have known that there was a risk of making contact with the head of an opponent, but did so anyway. This sanction applies even if the tackle starts below the line of the shoulders. This type of contact also applies to grabbing and rolling/ twisting around the head/ neck area even if the contact starts below the line of the shoulders.

Minimum sanction: Yellow card

Maximum sanction: Red card

Accidental Tackle

When making contact with another player during a tackle or attempted tackle or during other phases of the game, if a player makes accidental contact with an opponent's head, either directly or where the tackle starts below the line of the shoulders, the player MAY be sanctioned. This includes situations where the ball carrier slips into the tackle.

Minimum sanction: Penalty

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BUILDING CHARACTER SINCE 1886

For immediate release: Tuesday 13 December 2016

Issued on behalf of World Rugby

World Rugby announces new measures to limit contact with the head

- New law application guideline will codify zero-tolerance to contact with the head
- Approach informed by largest-ever study identifying most common situations leading to head injuries
- Players, coaches and match officials urged to be proactive in changing culture
- Latest step in proactive, evidence-driven approach to injury reduction

World Rugby has further strengthened its commitment to injury prevention by announcing details of a zero-tolerance approach to reckless and accidental head contact in the sport.

While injuries in the game are not on the rise, the federation continues to be proactive in furthering evidence-based strategies to reduce injury risk for all players.

In a change to law, World Rugby has redefined illegal (high) tackle categories and increased sanctions to deter high tackles via a law application guideline. This will apply at all levels of the game from 3 January 2017 introducing minimum on-field sanctions for reckless and accidental contact with the head, effectively lowering the acceptable height of the tackle. The guideline will be supported with a global education programme.

The approach, approved by the World Rugby Council after extensive expert, independent and union evaluation, combines with new disciplinary sanctions and a re-focus of match officials on dangerous play. It will provide a package of measures that aims to change culture in the sport to ensure that the head is a no-go area.

World Rugby Chairman Bill Beaumont said: "World Rugby continues to be proactive in aligning with the latest evidence-based recommendations in this priority player welfare area to ensure players and coaches at all levels of the game are appropriately educated, managed and

protected when it comes to head impacts and injury within the environment of a contact sport.

"We believe that we are playing a leading role in terms of the development and implementation of best-practice interventions and this important study further reflects our commitment to an evidence-based approach to player welfare. We believe that the invaluable data from this study will inform the law review process and lead to changes in playing or training practices."

A PLAYER said: "When it comes to protecting the head and neck of players, everyone is rightly very cautious now. The culture around concussion has completely changed and it's no longer acceptable for players to continue in a game if they're even suspected of having a concussion. When it comes to dealing effectively with concussion in sport, rugby is at the forefront. The International Rugby Players' Association (IRPA) supports any measure that protects our welfare and we are in favour of this initiative, which we believe will help further to reduce head and neck injuries at all levels of the game. Rugby is a physical sport and there will always be a level of injury risk associated with it but the sport is doing as much as it can to make it as safe as possible."

World Rugby Chief Medical Officer Dr Martin Raftery added: "The findings of this important research study will also be prepared into a series of scientific articles that we aim to have published in peer-reviewed journals. We continue to welcome and facilitate all quality research for the betterment of the game in this priority area.

"World Rugby is committed to playing a leading role in the sporting head injury agenda and continues to drive forward evidence-based strategies in education, prevention, management and research that are proving successful in protecting players at all levels of the sport."

From 3 January, two new categories of dangerous tackles will carry penalty offences to deter and eradicate high tackles:

Reckless tackle

A player is deemed to have made reckless contact during a tackle or attempted tackle or during other phases of the game if in making contact, the player knew or should have known that there was a risk of making contact with the head of an opponent, but did so anyway. This sanction applies even if the tackle starts below the line of the shoulders. This type of contact also applies to grabbing and rolling or twisting around the head/neck area even if the contact starts below the line of the shoulders.

Minimum sanction: Yellow card

Maximum sanction: Red card

Accidental tackle

When making contact with another player during a tackle or attempted tackle or during other phases of the game, if a player makes accidental contact with an opponent's head, either directly or where the contact starts below the line of the shoulders, the player may still be sanctioned. This includes situations where the ball-carrier slips into the tackle.

Minimum sanction: Penalty

VIEW THE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS HERE >>

Global education programme

World Rugby will support this initiative with a global awareness and education programme aimed at:

- Reinforcing the zero-tolerance culture regarding head contact in the game at all levels using practical advice and visual educational materials
- Educating that illegal tackles are not necessarily defined by where they start as they can slip up from a legal position to make contact with the neck/head
- Educating that "bent at the waist" while tackling and entering into contact is the optimal position for injury prevention
- Promoting best-possible technique to protect the head – expert advice will be obtained from elite defence coaches to identify the best tackle technique and the best impact position for the ball-carrier, including guidelines on double and treble tackling.

World Rugby is also investigating the practicality of a closed trial of a lowered tackle height at community age-grade level in 2017.

Extensive research programme

This ground-breaking programme is entirely evidence-based and these interventions have been developed by game experts following extensive research examining videos of more than 600 incidents leading to head injury assessments (HIA)* occurring across 1,516 elite-level matches globally between 2012 and 2015.

Specifically, World Rugby investigated circumstantial and law factors that may contribute to head injury events to enable the international federation's game expert group to determine whether potential law amendments or other interventions are indicated.

The study focused on tackle injuries and considered a number of conditions associated with the tackle including: The presence of foul play; what happened at the preceding event; the nature and angle of contact; body positions at the point of impact; the tackle height; the relative velocity at the time of impact; the number of tacklers involved; the type of tackle; and other variables.

The data confirmed that 76 per cent of all head injuries occur in the tackle, that the incidence of injury for the tackler is more than two and a half times greater than the ball-carrier and that tackle height is a contributing factor.

Headline findings:

- 611 HIA incidents were reviewed from 1,516 elite matches
- 76 per cent of HIA incidents occur in the tackle
- 72 per cent of HIA incidents in the tackle occur to the tackler
- Body position, speed and direction of tackle all influence risk

A specialist multi-disciplinary injury prevention group of game experts, comprising elite coaches and individuals with playing and match officiating experience at the elite and community levels was tasked with reviewing the data. The group then made recommendations to World Rugby's Law Review Group and education departments for consideration with the following injury prevention interventions proposed to and approved by World Rugby's Rugby and Executive Committees.

Editors' notes:

While injuries in elite rugby are not increasing, Rugby is committed to an evidence-based approach to furthering injury-prevention in the sport and collaborates with subject specialists to deliver its suite of education, prevention, management and research strategies that are proven to be benefitting players at all levels. These programmes include:

EDUCATION

- Global Recognise and Remove education programme in 2016 that has delivered an 80 per cent increase in the use of the www.playerwelfare.worldrugby.org website, which is delivered in 11 languages, while 3,100 medics have undertaken World Rugby's elite immediate care in rugby course, 69,000 people have completed online concussion

education and a further 250,000 have undertaken concussion education around the world within World Rugby's Rugby Ready programme

- World Rugby's head injury guidance materials for the general public used by governments, agencies and sporting federations around the world
- Concussion education modules and guidance for public, players and medics completed by 300,000 in 2015 and used as benchmark in sport, adopted by Scottish parliament (App available via iTunes store)
- Mandatory accreditation of elite rugby doctors through ground-breaking tournament player welfare standards programme delivering consistency of assessment and treatment for emergency care and concussion assessment and management

PREVENTION

- Innovative and ground-breaking tournament player welfare standards programme boosting head injury best practice compliance
- Untoward incident review system to ensure compliance of concussion management – a first for sport
- A revised disciplinary sanctions framework that will operate from 3 January that will see tougher sanctions introduced for dangerous play relating to the head
- Zero-tolerance approach to illegal or dangerous play within the match official community to deter contact with the head

MANAGEMENT

- Ground-breaking tournament player welfare standards adopted by major elite competitions, featuring six mandatory concussion education, management and review modules
- Temporary replacement for Head Injury Assessment (HIA) adopted in law with reduction of concussed players returning to play following assessment from 56 per cent pre-HIA to four per cent at Rugby World Cup 2015
- Introduction of pitch-side and medical room video review technology for head injury identification and assessment (used in over 60 per cent of permanent removal cases)
- Three point in time concussion assessment post-match and Graduated Return to Play
- Independent concussion consultants advising on return to play following concussive symptoms at Rugby World Cup 2015

RESEARCH

- Player welfare the central consideration behind future law amendments with specialist multi-disciplinary injury-prevention group overseeing largest-ever study of head injury causes in the game
- Commissioned and published peer-reviewed independent research investigating long-term health impact of rugby participation

For further information on World Rugby's concussion education programmes and public guidance visit www.playerwelfare.worldrugby.org and you can download World Rugby's free #RecogniseAndRemove concussion education App from the IOS store

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/world-rugby-concussion-management/id1031517215?mt=8>

[View World Rugby's Recognise and Remove education video here >>](#)

[Watch a full interview with Dr Martin Raftery here >>](#)

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World Rugby Injury Prevention briefing note: head injuries

Background: World Rugby has reaffirmed its commitment to injury-prevention with the announcement of amendments to law that will codify **two new categories of illegal tackle: reckless and accidental.**

The approach, which comes into effect globally on 3 January, is entirely evidence-based and is informed by the largest-ever study of causal factors behind head injuries in the elite game. The extensive body of research was evaluated in detail by a multi-disciplinary injury-prevention group and approved by EXCO and Council.

The approach forms part of an overall package to prevent illegal head contact with the game, combining with **tougher off-field disciplinary sanctions** and a **refocus on illegal high tackles by match officials.**

Key Messages

- Rugby's number one priority is player welfare and this important initiative furthers our evidence-based commitment to injury-prevention in the game
- The latest data suggests that overall injury-rates are not increasing in the game, but World Rugby continually reviews law to ensure that the game is as safe and enjoyable as possible to play at all levels of the game
- The two new categories of tackle: reckless and accidental, will operate globally from 3 January and are aimed at further preventing contact with the head by reducing the acceptable height and nature of the tackle.
- Combined with tougher disciplinary sanctions and a stricter vigilance from match officials, will reinforce a culture of zero-tolerance in the priority area of head protection
- The programme will be supported by a global education programme via World Rugby (worldrugby.org/playerwelfare) and via unions

What the research says

Injuries in the elite game have remained stable

Despite year on year fluctuations, the overall injury rates in elite rugby have remained stable since 2002 with no increase in incidence of the most common injuries (ACL, Shoulder instability)

- According to the latest research, injuries in elite rugby have remained stable since 2002. The overall risk (incidence and days absence) of match and training injury in the English Premiership remained stable during the 2013-14 season and was again within the "expected range" of season by season variation seen since the study began in 2002.
- However, reported concussion rates in the game have increased over the period owing to a change in culture and robust assessment processes through HIA implementation and Recognise and Remove education.

- The latest head injury causal data confirmed that 76 per cent of all head injuries occur in the tackle, that the incidence of injury for the tackler is more than two and a half times greater than the ball-carrier and that tackle height is a contributing factor.

World Rugby's approach to head injury prevention

World Rugby's approach to player welfare is evidence-based with leading independent experts and rugby medics advising key strategies that are successfully benefitting players at all levels of the game. These are concussion **EDUCATION, PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT and RESEARCH** strategies.

EDUCATION

- Global Recognise and Remove education programme in 2016 that has delivered an 80 per cent increase in the use of the www.playerwelfare.worldrugby.org website, which is delivered in 11 languages, while 3,100 medics have undertaken World Rugby's elite immediate care in rugby course, 69,000 people have completed online concussion education and a further 250,000 have undertaken concussion education around the world within World Rugby's Rugby Ready programme
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Q&A

World Rugby's approach to reducing injuries?

- World Rugby is committed to researching, identifying, promoting and implementing the best possible techniques for playing, coaching and officiating at all levels of the Game.
- We are at the forefront of sporting research in the areas of concussion, catastrophic injury, immediate care and cardiac best practice.
- We have a full-time Chief Medical Officer, Medical Advisory Committee, annual Medical Conference and dedicated working groups comprising the best physicians and experts in Rugby and other specialist areas to ensure that we continue to put the player first.
- We have also developed a suite of best practice resources such as *Rugby Ready* which is delivered by World Rugby and its member unions to ensuring the promotion of best-possible technique at all levels of the Game and reduce the risk of injury.

Does this approach suggest that rugby has an issue?

- World Rugby is committed to the highest-possible standards of player welfare and while the latest data suggests injuries are not on the rise, this evidence-based approach is an example of the sport's commitment to furthering injury-prevention via innovation in research

Are you concerned that there will be confusion?

- As with anything new, the approach may take time to bed in, but the research is compelling and we must collectively strive to ensure that we are providing players with the best-possible standards of care and protection
- A global education programme has been launched and the message to players is to avoid contact with the head