



## NOTES ON SPORT

# THE RAFFERTY RULES OF RUGBY

**I**NTERNATIONAL law has its great interpreters, and needs them, although few notice their observations. Rugby law needs interpreters, but has few.

Built up as necessity has seemed to indicate, Rugby rules by now demand that referees shall have the minds of lawyers, and a memory for case histories as long as the Chief Justice's.

Few players understand all the fine points and few enlarge their knowledge as they become referees. Rugby rules have become Rafferty rules, until it might almost be said that he plays the best football who takes least notice of them.

In this writer's memory, Rugby seemed to be a simple enough game before the English Union seized upon Cliff Porter's devastating wing-forward play to force on New Zealand an alteration in the scrum rules too obviously intended to alter our game to suit theirs.

### Sharp Practices in the Scrum

From that moment the scrum here and overseas has become the source of more downright trickery and thinly disguised illegal tactics than ever spoiled any good game. Victory in the scrums means the success or failure of a Rugby team, unless it has a back line of Cookes and Nicholls. And since the traditional 2-3-2 scrum was abandoned, or stolen away from us, victory in the scrum has gone more frequently to the forwards schooled in cunning avoidance of the rules than to forwards schooled in the proper traditions of Rugby.

The last visit of the Springboks produced one example after another of this truism. They were, most definitely a better team all round than any of the sorry collections we were able to produce that season, but a good deal of their strength in the pack came from their ability to suit their hooking methods to the very doubtful ruling prevailing at the time. Or perhaps they altered the ruling to suit their hooking methods. At all events they bluffed us completely. More power to them for making such a good job of it, and of rolling the All Blacks into muddy ignominy; but the fact remained that there could be no ruling on those scrum laws which was not doubtful.

Last year the rules were amended again. The half-back was to throw the ball in from knee height at a minimum distance of three feet from the scrum so that the ball landed in the scrum past the first feet of the outside hookers on either side. It could not be hooked until it landed. But from that position it could be hooked by any player in the scrum in any direction, so long as it passed behind the feet of the outside hookers. This meant that the ball could go practically straight in and out of the scrum, and the failure of spectators to understand this, and the failure of referees to be brave enough to enforce it in the face of continual booings and blahings, created a good deal of confusion which a little more knowledge would avoid. This rule might ultimately prove better than the previous rule; that the ball must pass three feet in the scrum before hooking; but that is doubtful; and it is doubtful if any juggling with the rules will ever improve an essentially bad method of scrummaging until (1) the whole business is radically revised, or (2) the referee accepts the responsibility of putting the ball into the scrum and sees for himself, from a necessarily good position, what happens to it when it gets there.

Scrum rules, of course, are not the only trouble. Practice games already seen this season have shown examples of doubt about elementary rules in the minds of both players and referees.

### Offside Play

An incident in one match started an argument about offside play among spectators, and has been recounted to *The Listener*. Long kicks had changed play quickly from one end of the field to the other. Side B had been defending, and a forward from A was well up near B's goal line. About B's twenty-five line was another group of A's forwards, towards a touchline. In the centre of the field on B's 25 was B's full-back. When the ball went away from the defending team A's full back received it and kicked it straight back down the field into the arms of B's full-back. Behind him was the solitary A forward moving back to be on side. Close to him and level with him were the other A forwards, offside.

B's full-back moved across to the A forwards. It is important to note that

these men, and the solitary A forward near the B goal line, were all more than 10 yards away from B's full back. As he was running across the field, thinking himself protected by the offside rule, the lone forward caught him neatly round the ankles and brought him down soundly. The referee ruled that A's man was offside.

The referee was wrong. A's man had not only been more than 10 yards from B's full-back when the full-back took the ball, but the full-back had also run five yards before he was tackled. So the tackle was perfectly legitimate.

This five- and ten-yard rule on offside play is seldom administered exactly.

### Cooke's Famous Try

Discussion on this point recalled a famous try scored in Auckland by Bert Cooke. He was well offside, picking himself up, when his full-back kicked a long ball straight down the field. The opposing full back, closer to Cooke's line than Cooke himself, jumped for it, intentionally, muffed, and diverted the ball to Cooke. Cooke accepted it, turned round, and ran unopposed to score. The referee awarded the try.

The referee was right. If the opposing full-back had touched the ball accidentally, the referee and Cooke would have been wrong. But his intentional attempt to take the ball, his touching the ball, put Cooke on side. Cooke knew the rules, and scored.

### On the Goal Line

Infringements on a defender's goal line are another source of bother to players without the necessary legalistic mind.

If an attacking player is tackled just short of the line, so that he falls on the ball, and is still held by the tackler, that ball immediately becomes dead; that is: as soon as it touches the ground. If the impetus of the attacker slides him over the line, then the ball is still dead and he may not be awarded a try.

This is called a "tackled" ball. If the tackler loses contact with the attacker, the rule does not apply; and if the attacker goes through the air over the line without the ball's touching the ground, it does not apply either. But if the ball is a "tackled" ball, and the attacker allows himself to carry it over

the line or hold it after contact with the ground, then he has committed an infringement and must be penalised.

### Penalty Kicks

This raises the question of where the penalty kick must be taken. If the attacker has infringed, then the goal line is taken as the mark. This gives rise to some complications. The player taking the kick may decide to stand close to the mark (the goal line) to take his kick. But the ball from a penalty kick must travel ten yards towards the mark. So what happens? The goal line is taken as ten yards no matter how far the kick has travelled. The kicker may stand one inch from the mark, kick the ball two inches, and force for a try. Or he may go back five yards, and kick six, and still the goal line as the mark is taken as ten yards. The same applies if the attacking team is awarded a penalty, say, three yards from the goal line, in the field. The ball may be kicked just the bare three yards, and it is still assumed to have travelled ten yards.

### A Case in Point

Tindill once worked this point very neatly. He was holding the ball while, so it seemed, Taylor ran up to take the kick. He was close to the line, closer than ten yards. Suddenly he turned and kicked the ball gently between two defenders, ran up, and scored. The try was given even though it turned out afterwards that the referee had given it because he thought, wrongly, that one of the defenders had touched the ball before Tindill forced.

Tindill's knowledge of the rules was worth five points there. Cooke's knowledge of the rules had been worth five points on that other occasion. Last week the failure of any of the 31 people on the ground to realise the significance of a rule cost a side a valuable advantage.

When you think of rules in terms of points for and against, matches won or lost, then it seems worth while to know something of them. Knowledge of the rules and proper interpretation is first of all up to referees. If they know what they are about then players have some chance of following them. If referees still refuse to treat Rugby as more than a Saturday's runabout, it is up to players to remind them of their responsibility.