



ENGLAND RUGBY

**LAW APPLICATION
GUIDELINES**

Season 2023/24

RFU DOMESTIC LAW VARIATION (DLV)

The Domestic Law Variation (DLV) is being introduced in the 2023/24 season, applicable to men's National League Rugby and below (formerly Level 3 and below) and women's Level 2 and below.

Including all matches played under the jurisdiction of the RFU and/or in RFU Competitions or any other competition, merit table or friendlies must be played in accordance with

[RFU Regulation 6](#) (Adult Competitions) and [RFU Regulation 15](#) (Age Grade Rugby)

For the avoidance of doubt to include World Rugby law variations of the game:

[Under -19](#)

[Sevens](#)

[Tens](#)

Definition

Law 9 Foul Play - Current Law

DANGEROUS PLAY

9.11. Players must not do anything that is reckless or dangerous to others including leading with the elbow or forearm, or jumping into, or over, a tackler.

9.12. A player must not physically or verbally abuse anyone. Physical abuse includes, but is not limited to, biting, punching, contact with the eye or eye area, striking with any part of the arm, shoulder, head or knee(s), stamping, trampling, tripping or kicking.

9.13. A player must not tackle an opponent early, late or dangerously. Dangerous tackling includes, but is not limited to, tackling or attempting to tackle an opponent above the line of the shoulders even if the tackle starts below the line of the shoulders.

[World Rugby - Law 9 Foul Play](#)

Law 9 Foul Play – RFU Domestic Law Variation

DANGEROUS PLAY

9.11. (a) Players must not do anything that is reckless or dangerous to others including leading with the **head, shoulder**, elbow or forearm, or jumping into, or over, **an opponent**.

(b) **Ball carriers must not lower their height significantly before making contact with an opponent in open play.**

9.12. A player must not physically or verbally abuse anyone. Physical abuse includes, but is not limited to, biting, punching, contact with the eye or eye area, striking with any part of the arm, head, shoulder, **forearm** or knee(s), stamping, trampling, tripping or kicking.

9.13. A player must not tackle **or attempt to tackle** an opponent early, late or dangerously. Dangerous tackling includes, but is not limited to, tackling or attempting to tackle an opponent **in open play above the base of the sternum even if the tackle starts below the base of the sternum.**

RFU DLV – Application Guidelines for Players; Coaches; and Match Officials

Introduction

Scientific research into concussions in the Game around the rugby world demonstrates that the greatest risk of concussion arises from head-to-head contact. The six characteristics of the tackle most associated with higher risk of concussion are described as ‘active’...not passive, ‘active shoulder’, ‘higher contact on the ball carriers body’, ‘tackler is upright’, ‘tackler is moving fast/accelerating’, ‘tackle is front on’.

In order to reduce this risk, and in accordance with the scientific advice, the Rugby Football Union has resolved to reduce the tackle height by introducing a Domestic Law Variation (DLV). World Rugby is encouraging all Unions to address this important player welfare issue in a similar way.

By reducing the legal height at which an opponent may make contact with the ball carrier, it is intended that the head of the ball carrier and the head of an opponent seeking to tackle the ball carrier will not be in the same space and the risk of head-to-head contact will reduce considerably.

This Guidance Note is intended to assist Players; Coaches; Match Officials; and the Game in general in their understanding and implementation of the DLV.

The DLV

The Rugby Football Union has decided to implement the decision to lower the height of contact between opponents in open play by making variations to Law 9 – Foul Play.

The Obligations of the Ball Carrier and their opponent seeking to make a tackle

Under the DLV both the ball carrier and their opponent have responsibilities to avoid head-to-head contact. This is best achieved if the ball carrier does not lower their body height or dip down just before contact. This might be described as ‘late & low’.

englandrugby.com/tackleheight

The following explains the respective responsibilities:

The ball carrier

- A ball carrier must not lower their body height or dip down just before contact with an opponent as this will put their opponent at risk of their head being contacted by the ball carrier’s head. This might be described as *‘late & low’*

- The ball carrier must not lower their head below their hips as this risks encroaching on the head space of the opponent seeking to tackle them.
- A ball carrier will not be at risk of sanction if they are prevented from being upright or are made to lower their body height by the action of another player.

The ball carrier's opponent(s)

- An opponent seeking to effect a tackle on the ball carrier will need to ensure that the point of first contact is below the bottom of the base of the sternum (described variously as 'stomach', 'midriff', 'tummy' or 'belly').

The law in detail

The relevant provisions of the Domestic Law Variation (DLV) are as follows:

9.11. (a) Players must not do anything that is reckless or dangerous to others including leading with the **head, shoulder**, elbow or forearm, or jumping into, or over, **an opponent**.

The change here is to preclude leading with the head or shoulder and to add in jumping into an opponent as well as jumping over an opponent. The word "opponent" is used instead of "tackler" because not every contact with a player will lead to a tackle as defined by the Law.

9.11. (b) Ball carriers must not lower their height significantly before making contact with an opponent in open play.

This part of the DLV introduces a new responsibility on the ball carrier, as described above, not to significantly lower their body height or dip into contact with an opponent. Such an action would increase the risk of a head-to-head contact by putting the ball carrier's head into the space which their opponent is entitled to occupy in order to try to effect a tackle.

The DLV only applies in **open play**. Defined in law as: *The period after a kick-off, restart kick, free-kick, penalty or set piece and before the next phase, or the period between phases of play, excluding when the ball is dead.*

Consequently, this element of the DLV does not apply to the **Phases of Play**. Defined in law as: *Scrum; Lineout; Ruck; and Maul.*

Significantly will be a matter of judgement for the Match Officials and what is significant will vary according to the circumstances of the particular case.

Bearing in mind that the intent of the DLV is to reduce the risk of head-to-head contact by keeping the ball carrier's head and their opponent's head apart, so as to avoid head-to-head contact:

- A ball carrier bracing their body by a few centimeters to receive contact by an opponent might not create a risk of a head-to-head contact and should not therefore be liable to sanction.

[RFU DLV - illustration of ball carrier bracing for tackle 1](#)

[RFU DLV - illustration of ball carrier bracing for tackle 2](#)

- A ball carrier will be at risk of sanction if they lower their head below the line of their hips.

[RFU DLV - illustration of ball carrier dipping into the tackle 1](#)

[RFU DLV - illustration of ball carrier dipping into the tackle 2](#)

- A ball carrier who seeks to avoid, or reduce the effectiveness of, an attempt to tackle them by dipping or lowering their body height below their hips, thereby increasing the risk of head-to-head contact, will be at a greater risk of sanction.

[RFU DLV - illustration of ball carrier dipping into the tackle 3](#)

9.12. A player must not physically or verbally abuse anyone. Physical abuse includes, but is not limited to, biting, punching, contact with the eye or eye area, striking with any part of the arm, head, shoulder, **forearm** or knee(s), stamping, trampling, tripping or kicking.

This provision is included as it is an integral part of the Foul Play Law.

9.13. A player must not tackle **or attempt to tackle** an opponent early, late or dangerously. Dangerous tackling includes, but is not limited to, tackling or attempting to tackle an opponent **in open play above the base of the sternum even if the tackle starts below the base of the sternum.**

This is the provision in the DLV which reduces the legal tackle height. The DLV aims to reduce the height at which an opponent can first make contact with a ball carrier.

Again, this element of the DLV applies only “in open play” and does not therefore apply to Scrum; Lineout; Ruck; and Maul.

- The highest legal level of contact with an opponent is below the base of the sternum.

[RFU DLV - illustration of a legal front on tackle 1](#)

[RFU DLV - illustration of a legal front on tackle 2](#)

[RFU DLV - illustration of a legal side on tackle 1](#)

[RFU DLV - illustration of legal tackle today but liable to sanction under DLV 1](#)

[RFU DLV - illustration of legal tackle today but liable to sanction under DLV 2](#)

- Contact below the base of the sternum which slides up to or above the sternum will put the opponent of the ball carrier at risk of sanction as this could lead to a head-to-head contact.
- An “arm grab”, where an opponent seeks to tackle a ball carrier by seizing their arm to pull them to ground will not put the opponent at risk of sanction if it is not otherwise dangerous.

[RFU DLV - illustration of tackling a ball carrier by seizing their arm](#)

Sanctions

The law specifies a Penalty as the sanction for a tackle above the **base of the sternum**.

A player who, in attempting a tackle, makes contact below the **base of the sternum** but slides upwards in the process may be liable to sanction. This will not be automatic under the law but will be a matter of judgement for the Match Official, as is the case at present, taking into account all of the circumstances.

Other Matters

Pick & Drive

An area of the game that is commonly known as the *Pick and Drive*, (also described as *Pick & Go*) is when a player picks up the ball and drives forward, often near to a tackle or ruck. *Pick and Drive* scenarios can happen anywhere on the pitch, but most often occur close to the opposition's try line.

Pick and Drive continues while the ball is being played near to the phase of play and is over when the phase of play ends as defined in law (see below). **Near** is defined in law as: *Within one meter*.

Research and data tell us that in most instances *Pick & Drive* occurs at lower speeds and with lower impacts and that the *Pick and Drive* need not be affected by the proposed tackle height change and liable to sanction if it is not otherwise dangerous.

[RFU DLV - illustration of Pick & Drive 1](#)

[RFU DLV - illustration of Pick & Drive 2](#)

Two Player Tackle

Law 14 – Tackle

REQUIREMENTS FOR A TACKLE

1. For a tackle to occur, the ball carrier is held and brought to ground by one or more opponents.
2. Being brought to ground means that the ball carrier is lying, sitting or has at least one knee on the ground or on another player who is on the ground.
3. Being held means that a tackler must continue holding the ball carrier until the ball carrier is on the ground.

PLAYERS IN A TACKLE

4. Players in a tackle are:
 - a. Tackled player.
 - b. Tackler(s).
 - c. Others:
 - i. Player(s) who hold the ball carrier during a tackle but do not go to ground.
 - ii. Player(s) who arrive to contest possession in the tackle.
 - iii. Player(s) who are already on the ground.

If a second tackler arrives, this player will be subject to the DLV requirements of **Law 9.13**.

[World Rugby - Law 14 Tackle](#)

Law 8 - Score

8.2. A try is scored when an attacking player:

- a. Is first to ground the ball in the opponents' in-goal.
- b. Is first to ground the ball when a scrum, ruck or maul reaches the goal line.
- c. With the ball is tackled short of the goal line and the player's momentum carries them in a continuous movement along the ground into the opponents' in-goal, and the player is first to ground the ball.
- d. Is tackled near to the opponents' goal line and the player immediately reaches out and grounds the ball.
- e. Who is in touch or touch-in-goal, grounds the ball in the opponents' in-goal provided the player is not holding the ball.

The ball carrier is permitted to lower their body height in an attempt to score. An opponent of the ball carrier may attempt to prevent the ball carrier from scoring. In doing so, players must not do anything dangerous or reckless to others.

[World Rugby - Law 8 Score](#)

[RFU DLV - try scoring 1](#)

[RFU DLV - try scoring 2](#)

[RFU DLV - try scoring 3](#)

Law 15 - Ending a Ruck

17. When the ball has been clearly won by a team at the ruck, and is available to be played, the referee calls "use it", after which the ball must be played away from the ruck within five seconds.
Sanction: Scrum.

18. The ruck ends and play continues when the ball leaves the ruck or when the ball in the ruck is on or over the goal line.

19. The ruck ends when the ball becomes unplayable. If the referee decides that the ball will probably not emerge within a reasonable time, a scrum is awarded.

[World Rugby - Law 15 Ruck](#)

Law 16 - Ending a Maul

16. A maul ends and play continues when:

- a. The ball or ball carrier leaves the maul.
- b. The ball is on the ground.
- c. The ball is on or over the goal line.

17. A maul ends unsuccessfully when:

- a. The ball becomes unplayable.
- b. The maul collapses (not as a result of foul play).
- c. The maul does not move towards a goal line for longer than five seconds and the ball does not emerge.
- d. The ball carrier goes to ground and the ball is not immediately available.

- e. The ball is available to be played, the referee has called “use it” and it has not been played within five seconds of the call. *Sanction: Scrum.*

World Rugby - Law 16 Maul

Law 18 - Ending a Lineout

37. The lineout ends when:
- a. The ball or a player in possession of the ball:
 - i. leaves the lineout; or
 - ii. enters the area between the touchline and the five-meter line; or
 - iii. goes beyond the 15-metre line.
 - b. A ruck or maul forms and all of the feet of all of the players in the ruck or maul move beyond the mark of touch.
 - c. The ball becomes unplayable.

World Rugby - Law 18 Touch, quick throw and lineout

Law 19 - Ending a Scrum

36. The scrum ends:
- a. When the ball comes out of the scrum in any direction except the tunnel.
 - b. When the ball reaches the feet of the hindmost player and it is picked up by that player or is played by that team’s scrum-half.
 - c. When the number eight picks up the ball from the feet of a second-row player.
 - d. When the referee blows the whistle for an infringement.
 - e. When the ball in a scrum is on or over the goal line.

World Rugby - Law 19 Scrum



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