

Rugby

Rugby union football, commonly known simply as **rugby union** or more often just **rugby**, is a [close-contact team sport](#) that originated at [Rugby School](#) in the first half of the 19th century. Rugby is simply based on running with the ball in hand. In its most common form, a game is played between two teams of 15 players each, using an [oval-shaped ball](#) on a rectangular field called a pitch. The field has H-shaped [goalposts](#) at both ends.

Rugby union is a popular sport around the world, played by people regardless of gender, age or size. In 2023, there were more than 10 million people playing worldwide, of whom 8.4 million were registered players. [World Rugby](#), previously called the International Rugby Football Board (IRFB) and the International Rugby Board (IRB), has been the governing body for rugby union since 1886, and currently has 116 countries as full members and 18 associate members.

In 1845, the first laws were written by students attending Rugby School; other significant events in the early development of rugby include the decision by [Blackheath F.C.](#) to leave [The Football Association](#) in 1863 and, in 1895, the [split](#) between rugby union and [rugby league](#). Historically rugby union was an amateur sport, but in 1995 formal restrictions on payments to players were removed, making the game openly professional at the highest level for the first time.^[3]

Rugby union spread from the [Home Nations](#) of [Great Britain](#) and [Ireland](#), with other early exponents of the sport including [Australia](#), [New Zealand](#), [South Africa](#) and [France](#). The sport is followed primarily in [Great Britain](#), [Ireland](#), France, [Georgia](#), [Oceania](#), [Southern Africa](#), [Argentina](#), and to a lesser extent [Italy](#), [Uruguay](#), the [United States](#),^[4]^[5]^[6] [Canada](#), and [Japan](#), its growth occurring during the expansion of the British Empire and through French proponents ([Rugby Europe](#)) in Europe. Countries that have adopted rugby union as their *de facto* national sport include [Fiji](#), Georgia, [Madagascar](#),^[7] [New Zealand](#), [Samoa](#), [Tonga](#), and [Wales](#).

International matches have taken place since 1871 when the first game was played between Scotland and England at [Raeburn Place](#) in Edinburgh. The [Rugby World Cup](#), first held in 1987, is held every four years. The [Six Nations Championship](#) in Europe and [The Rugby Championship](#) in the Southern Hemisphere are other important international competitions that are held annually.

National club and provincial competitions include the [Premiership](#) in England, the [Top 14](#) in France, the [Bunnings NPC](#) in New Zealand, the [League One](#) in Japan and the [Currie Cup](#) in South Africa. Other transnational club competitions include the [United Rugby Championship](#) of club teams from Ireland, Italy, Scotland, South Africa and Wales, [European Rugby Champions Cup](#) in Europe, and [Super Rugby Pacific](#) in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.