

TOUCH KENYA

NATIONAL TOUCH DEVELOPMENT BODY

REFEREE HANDBOOK

Training & On-Field Reference for New Referees

Everything you need to officiate your first matches with confidence.

Based on the Federation of International Touch (FIT) Playing Rules, 5th Edition.

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A tear-off Quick Reference card is included at the back.

How to Use This Handbook

This handbook is built in two layers so you are never overwhelmed. You can start refereeing after reading only the first layer.

- **Core (the main text):** everything you need to safely and confidently referee your first matches. Read it start to finish. If you learn only the Core, you can officiate a game.
- **Level 2 boxes** (marked “*Level 2 · grow into this*”): the more advanced rules and finer judgement calls. Skip these on your first read. Come back to them once the Core feels natural, usually after a few matches. It is the same rulebook, just introduced when you are ready.

You do not need to memorise anything on day one. Keeping players safe, making the touch, and counting out loud matter far more than knowing every rule. The rest comes with reps.

DAY-ONE HABIT

The one habit that matters most: **count the touches out loud, every possession:** “one ... two ... three.” If both teams and the other referee can hear your count, half your job is already done. A clear, audible count prevents most disputes before they start.

Rule numbers in brackets, for example (25.1), point to the FIT Playing Rules, 5th Edition, so you can cross-check anything quickly.

1. What a Referee Actually Does

If you have never refereed before, start here. Your job is not to know every rule by heart on day one. Your job is to keep the game safe, fair, and flowing. Under the FIT rules the referee is the sole judge on all match matters inside the perimeter and has authority over all players, coaches and officials (25.1).

Across a match you are responsible for six things:

- Checking the field and markers are safe before kick-off (25.1.1).
- Applying the rules and making rulings (25.1.2).
- Keeping the touch count, out loud, every possession (25.1.5).
- Awarding tries and tracking the score (25.1.4).
- Awarding penalties and managing discipline (25.1.6).
- Reporting any sin bins, dismissals or injuries afterwards (25.1.7).

The captain rule: only team captains may seek clarification from you, and only during a break in play or when you allow it (25.2). You do not owe an explanation to every player who shouts.

2. The Field & the Key Distances

Touch is a game of distances. Almost every decision comes back to whether a player is in the right place. Learn these five numbers before anything else; they drive most of your calls.

Distance	What it governs
7 metres	How far defenders retire at every rollball, and after making a touch (15.1, 15.5). The single most-used distance in the game.
10 metres	How far defenders retire at a tap or penalty tap (15.2).
7m zone	The area between the 7m line and the try line, the defensive red zone. Stricter rules apply here.
1 metre	The ruck/rollball area between the player rolling the ball and the half. Also the maximum the ball may roll back at a rollball.
The field	70m long by 50m wide, between the sidelines and dead-ball lines (both are OUT of play). In-goal areas sit at each end.

Pre-match, every time: walk the field, check the line markings and any markers or cones for anything a player could trip on or land badly against, and confirm both try lines and the 7m lines are visible. This is a rule, not a courtesy (25.1.1).

A full field diagram, marked with the single-referee position, is in *Appendix A* at the back.

3. Starting & Restarting Play

Every match and every score restarts with a TAP. Get the tap right and you control the tempo of the game.

3.1 The coin toss

Captains toss in front of you. The winner chooses one of: direction to run, which interchange area to use, or which team starts with the ball (7.1). Teams swap directions at half time and the other team taps to restart (7.3).

3.2 What a legal tap looks like

The ball is placed on the ground at or behind the mark, the player releases both hands and taps it with the foot so it does not roll more than one metre, then picks it up cleanly. A tap is NOT a kick. Before you allow the tap, check:

- All attackers must be onside, behind the ball. If not, send them back and re-tap (7.5).
- At least four defenders must be onside before the tap is taken (7.6).
- The tap must be taken without delay, no stalling (7.7).

Taps start each half, restart after a try (the team that conceded restarts), and take a penalty (Rule 7).

4. The Touch

A touch is any contact between the ball-carrier and a defender (including contact on the ball, hair or clothing) and can be made by either player. Your core safety rule lives here.

DAY-ONE HABIT

Minimum force (10.3): **both attackers and defenders must use only the minimum force needed to make a touch.** Anything that looks like a push, grab or shove is a penalty to the other team. Be strict here from day one. It is the rule that keeps touch non-contact and safe, and it sets the tone for the whole game.

Things new referees commonly miss:

- A defender cannot CLAIM a touch that did not happen. If they claim one and you are unsure, the touch does not count, and a false claim is a penalty plus sin bin (10.2).
- After a touch is made, the attacker must NOT pass; doing so is a penalty to the defending team (10.6).
- A defender must not deliberately knock the ball out during a touch (10.5). If it comes out accidentally, the touch still counts and attack keeps the ball (10.4).
- After making a touch, the defender must retire 7 metres without interfering (15.5). Failing to retire is one of the most common penalties you will give.

Special case, the HALF: the half (the player who picks up at the rollball) may run or pass but cannot be touched while holding the ball. If the half is touched, it is a change of possession (10.7). The half also cannot score (see Section 6).

5. The Rollball

After every touch, play restarts with a rollball. This is the most technical moment in touch and the one beginners get wrong most often, so watch it closely.

5.1 What a correct rollball looks like

The player stands on the mark, faces the opponents' try line, makes a genuine effort to stand square to the sidelines, places the ball on the ground in a controlled way, and either steps forward over it, rolls it back no more than one metre, or passes a foot over it (13.1). The half then picks it up.

5.2 Common rollball infringements

What happened	Your call	Rule
Ball not placed or rolled properly on the mark	Change of possession	13.1
Rollball performed off the mark	Penalty to defenders	13.2
Voluntary rollball (rolled before being touched)	Penalty to defenders	13.3
Delaying the rollball	Penalty to defenders	13.4
Defenders interfering with the rollball or the half	Penalty to attack, 10m forward	13.11

Rollball inside the 7m zone: when a touch is made inside the defending 7m zone, the attacking team rolls the ball on the 7m line, in line with where the touch was made (13.14). This keeps a fair attacking platform near the line.

Defenders moving up early: defenders moving forward before the half touches the ball is managed and, if it continues, penalised (13.12). Early in your career, talk them back before you reach for the whistle.

6. Scoring a Try

A try is worth one point and is awarded when any player EXCEPT the half places the ball on or over the try line without being touched (14.1, 14.2). The player must have control of the ball before grounding it (14.3).

Two situations to watch:

- If a player releases the ball short of the line while diving to score, they must rollball to restart and a touch is counted (14.4).
- If the HALF places the ball over the line it is NOT a try; it is a change of possession. The half cannot score. This is a frequent beginner error to catch.

Most tries scored wins. Equal tries is a draw, unless the competition requires a winner, in which case you go to a Drop-Off (see the Level 2 box in Section 9).

7. Offside: Where Players Must Be

Offside is simply “wrong place.” There are two reference points, and you will police them constantly.

- **At a ROLLBALL:** every defender must retire 7 metres (or to their try line if closer). Not retired = penalty to attack (15.1).
- **At a TAP:** every defender must retire 10 metres (or to their try line). Not retired = penalty to attack (15.2).
- Defenders must not retire an unreasonable distance BEYOND their try line (15.3).
- **Attacker offside:** an attacker positioned forward of the ball. Attackers must stay behind the ball.

Stricter inside the 7m zone: at a rollball in the zone (or a penalty tap within 10m of the line), defenders must have both feet on or behind their try line (15.4). In practice: when attack is near your line, look for defenders’ feet on the line.

8. Penalties, Advantage & Discipline

8.1 Awarding a penalty

A penalty restarts with a tap. You must indicate the mark before the tap is taken (18.5). On day one, that is enough: show the mark clearly and let the non-offending team tap.

LEVEL 2 · GROW INTO THIS

Exact penalty positioning: infringements between the 7m lines are marked at the point of infringement (18.2); inside the 7m zone the tap is taken at the nearest 7m line (18.3); infringements in-goal or out of the field come back to 7m infield or the nearest 7m line (18.4).

8.2 Advantage: let it flow

You do not have to blow every infringement immediately. If the non-offending team is better off playing on, allow advantage and only come back to the penalty if no advantage comes (Rule 19). A whistle that kills a promising attack is often the wrong whistle.

LEVEL 2 · GROW INTO THIS

Holding the whistle: as you grow, learn to delay the whistle a beat to see whether advantage develops. When you are brand new, a clear and consistent whistle beats a clever one, so start simple and add this judgement with experience.

8.3 The discipline ladder

Misconduct includes repeated breaches, swearing, disputing your calls, excessive force, poor sportsmanship, or any contact such as tripping or striking (20.1). Your sanctions escalate:

Sanction	When / what it means	Rule
Penalty	The standard response to most infringements.	18
Forced Interchange	More serious than a penalty. The offender is replaced; play restarts with a penalty to the other team.	21
Sin Bin	Player off for 4 completed possessions. They still count as on-field; the team is a player short and cannot replace them.	22
Dismissal	Sent off for the rest of the match, cannot be replaced. An automatic 2-match suspension follows.	23

LEVEL 2 · GROW INTO THIS

Repeated infringement near the line (18.8): if the defending team gives away three penalties on entering their own 7m zone in a single possession, the last offender is excluded until the end of that possession; the team plays a player short for the rest of that set.

Penalty try (18.9): if any action by a player, official or spectator clearly stops a try that would otherwise be scored, award the try. This is your strongest tool against cynical play near the line.

9. Interchange & the Drop-Off

9.1 Interchange

Players may interchange at any time, unlimited times (17.1, 17.2). The off-field player waits in the interchange area, and the swap happens only after the player coming off has entered that area (17.3, 17.4).

The exception you must police: after an intercept or line break, NO interchange until the next touch or the ball is dead (17.7). This stops a fresh player running on to save a try: penalty try plus sin bin if they do.

LEVEL 2 · GROW INTO THIS

The Drop-Off: deciding a drawn knockout.

Only used when a competition needs a winner from a draw. Each team drops to four players and restarts from halfway; the team that did not start the match with the ball taps (24.1.1, 24.1.2). Two minutes of extra time: if one team leads at the end, they win (24.1.4). If still level, remove another player at the next touch or dead ball and play on until someone scores (24.1.5, 24.1.6).

Mixed drop-off: no more than two males on the field during the drop-off (24.2). Touch Kenya may set its own female-minimum conditions on top of this; always check the competition guidelines for the event you are officiating.

10. Positioning

At our level most matches have ONE referee, so master solo positioning first. Whatever the setup, one idea drives everything: be where you can see the offside line and the touch at the same time.

10.1 Refereeing on your own (one referee)

Position yourself with the defensive line but slightly BEHIND it, not level with it and not in front of it. From just behind the line you can anticipate the touch, then retreat smoothly to 7 metres from the ruck to call the defenders back the moment the touch is made. Sitting behind the line is what lets you manage the retreat instead of chasing it.

Do NOT stand directly in front of the attacking ball-carrier: you get in the way of the very defenders you are trying to manage. Aim to be one to two players across from the ruck: close enough to see the touch, the rollball and whether the half is square, but never so central that you block the defence or lose sight of the contact.

Referee the line with your voice. Keep the defence honest with clear, continuous instruction while the attacker is running:

- “Keep moving back ... back ... you’re onside.”
- “Leave him, don’t touch, retreat.”
- “Get onside!” Then penalise if they ignore you.

On a change of possession: move quickly into the defensive line of the team that has just lost the ball; they are now defending. Getting across fast keeps play flowing and lets you check the new defensive line is onside from the rollball. As a solo referee you constantly switch ends as possession turns over, so anticipate the change and start moving the instant the ball changes hands. Because you carry the count, the touch, the offside line and the score on your own, a loud touch count matters even more here.

LEVEL 2 · GROW INTO THIS

Refereeing as a pair (two referees).

Each referee lines up with a team, roughly in line with it and facing the other referee across the field. As play and possession move, your point of reference switches with it.

Who has authority: the referee in line with the DEFENDING team makes the call; they are best placed to judge the touch and the defensive offside line. The other referee (with the attacking team) supports by advising through discreet hand signals, making the call only if clearly closer with the better view, or if the defending referee asks.

Agree before kick-off: who decides, how you will signal a try to each other, and who keeps the count, so you are never both whistling, or both silent, at the same moment.

10.2 Movement (both setups)

Movement beats standing still. Keep moving with the line and with play; if you get caught flat-footed you will miss the touch or lose the offside line. Stay active and you will be in position without having to think about it.

11. Change of Possession

In these situations there is no penalty. The ball simply turns over, and the team gaining possession restarts play with a rollball.

CHANGE OF POSSESSION

No penalty: the ball turns over and the new team restarts with a rollball

- Sixth touch: the set is complete (9.1)
- The ball is dropped or knocked to the ground (9.4)
- The half is touched while holding the ball (10.7)
- The half places the ball over the try line; the half cannot score (14.2)
- The ball is not placed or rolled properly on the mark (13.1)
- The ball, or the ball-carrier, makes contact with the sideline or ground out of play; rollball seven metres in-field (13.6)
- A player releases the ball short of the line while diving to score; a touch is counted (14.4)

Note on the ball touched in flight: a deliberate defensive touch on the ball in flight is not a change of possession; it is a new six to the attacking team, whether the ball goes to ground or is caught by the same team. Only an accidental deflection that goes to ground is a change of possession (Rule 12).

12. Penalties: What Each Team Must Not Do

Most infringements result in a penalty against the offending team. A penalty against the attack is awarded to the defence, and a penalty against the defence is awarded to the attack; the two are the same event named from opposite sides. Both teams restart a penalty with a tap. Rule numbers refer to the FIT Playing Rules, 5th Edition.

PENALTIES AGAINST THE ATTACK <i>Awarded to the defence</i>	PENALTIES AGAINST THE DEFENCE <i>Awarded to the attack</i>
● Pass after being touched (10.6) ● Forward pass (11.1) ● Rollball off the mark (13.2) ● Voluntary rollball: rolling before you're touched (13.3) ● Delay the rollball (13.4) ● Incorrect rollball: hips not square, or not rolled between the legs ● Roll the ball more than one metre ● Obstruction: shielding your ball-carrier ● Being offside at a tap (forward of the tap)	● Fail to retire 7m after a touch, or not be onside at the rollball (15.5, 15.1) ● Use more than minimum force: push, grab or shove (10.3) ● Falsely claim a touch (also a sin bin) (10.2) ● Knock the ball out deliberately during a touch (10.5) ● Interfere with the rollball or the half (13.11) ● Be offside at a tap (not back 10m) (15.2) ● Fail to move up, or feet off the line in the 7m zone (15.4) ● Ruck infraction, holding, obstruction or rough play

Watch the rollball split: a ball placed or rolled badly ON the mark is a change of possession (13.1), but performing the rollball OFF the mark, or rolling it before being touched, is a penalty (13.2 / 13.3).

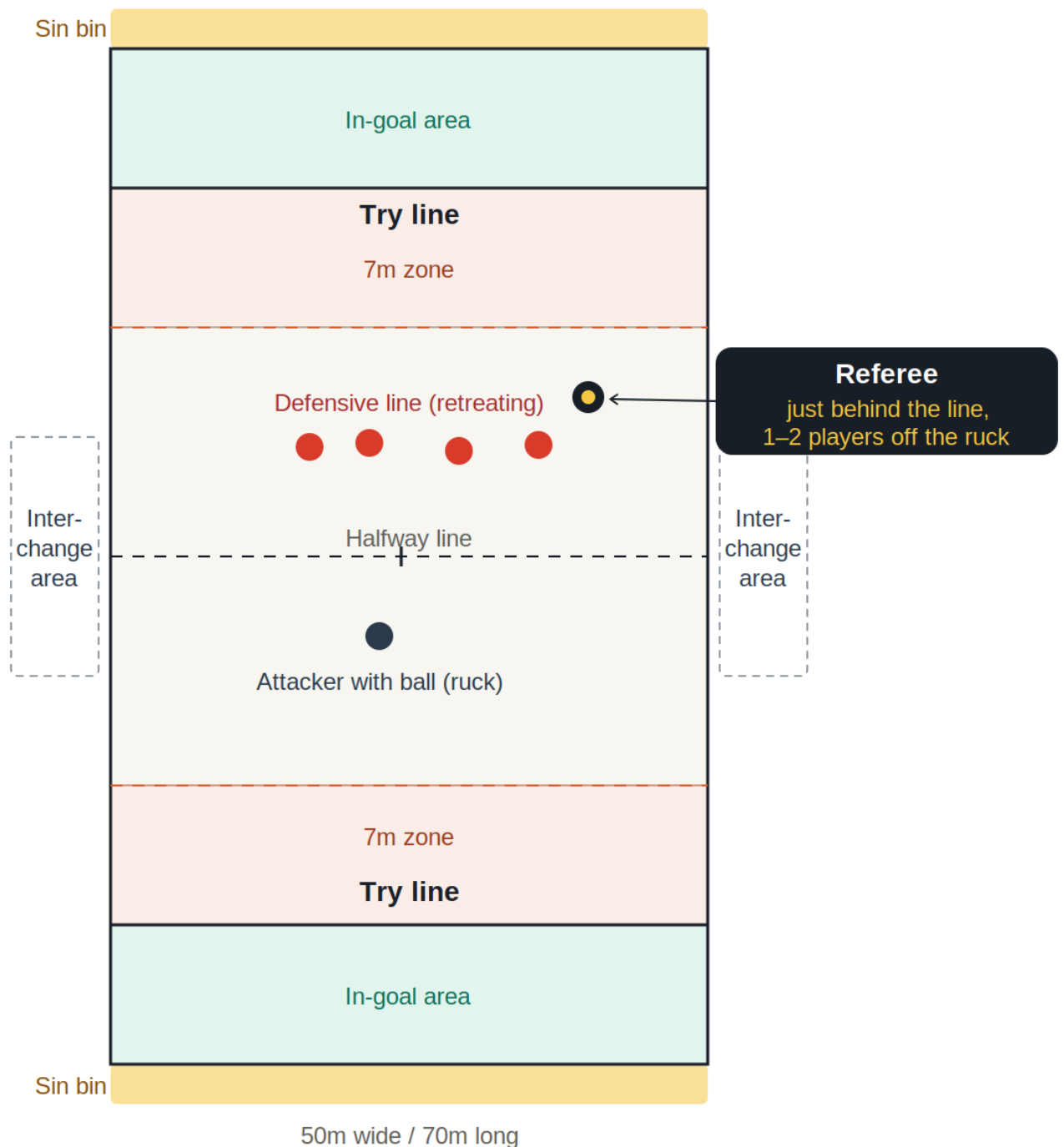
13. Status & Use

This handbook is a Touch Kenya training resource. It summarises and interprets the Federation of International Touch (FIT) Playing Rules, 5th Edition (© Touch Football Australia 2020) for the purpose of training referees in Kenya; it does not replace the official rulebook. Where this handbook and the FIT rules differ, the FIT rules and any published Touch Kenya competition variations prevail. Rule numbers throughout refer to the FIT 5th Edition for easy cross-checking.

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Appendix A: The Field of Play

This diagram shows the field, its zones and the single-referee position described in Section 10.1. The referee sits slightly behind the defensive line and one to two players across from the ruck, never directly in front of the ball-carrier, so they can anticipate the touch and retreat to 7 metres to call the line back.



Field of play: 70m long by 50m wide. Sidelines and dead-ball lines are out of play. Diagram is schematic and not drawn to scale.



TEAR-OFF QUICK REFERENCE

Touch Kenya • Sideline Card • FIT 5th Edition

KEY NUMBERS

7m	10m	6 / 6	1m
retire at rollball / after a touch	retire at a tap	touches per set / then handover	ruck & max rollback

MOST COMMON CALLS

Situation	Call	Rule
Defender doesn't retire 7m	Penalty to attack	15.5
Half is touched	Change of possession	10.7
Half scores	No try, change of possession	14.2
Pass after the touch	Penalty to defence	10.6
Ball dropped / knocked down	Change of possession	9.4
False claim of a touch	Penalty + Sin Bin	10.2
Cynical play stops a certain try	Penalty Try	18.9

BEFORE YOU ALLOW A TAP

- All attackers onside (behind the ball).
- At least 4 defenders onside.
- Mark indicated; tap taken without delay; ball moves $\leq 1\text{m}$.

DISCIPLINE LADDER

Penalty → **Forced Interchange** → **Sin Bin** (4 possessions, no replacement) → **Dismissal** (rest of match + 2-match ban).

REMEMBER

- Count the touches OUT LOUD, every set.
- Minimum force, always: keep it safe and non-contact.
- Only captains may query a decision, in a break in play.
- Play advantage: don't kill a good attack with the whistle.