

What Position Do They Play?

A rugby team is composed of 15 players. They are separated into forwards (collectively called the scrum or pack) and backs. The scrum group are roughly equivalent to the linemen, and the backs similar to backs in American football [which is not surprising, since gridiron came from rugby!].

The forwards work as a group and attempt to win possession of the ball, while the backs will attempt to advance it. One should not confuse the various rugby positions with those on an American football team, though there is a rough similarity in set play (scrums, lineouts, penalties). Rugby forwards often handle the ball and must be adept at passing and catching, while backs must be prepared to occasionally ruck and maul. There are so many variables during the match that there is a minimum of programmed play calling like in American football. The players must think and react for themselves. The creation of magical moments of attacking and counter-attacking movements finishing with a score is what separates rugby from all other sports.

In order to help you understand why a particular athlete would decide to play which position, one can make some GENERAL comparisons with other sports. Compare the rugby positions and what is required to play them with other sports positions they may have played in the past. It's not perfect, but you will soon see the similarities.

[unlike other sports where you can generally wear any number and play any position, rugby players wear the number of the position they are playing. Substitutes wear higher numbers when they come in.]

Front Row - Consists of two props (#1, #3) and the hooker (#2). These are the pillars of the scrum and they are often short and squat

Props - football interior line, baseball catcher, basketball forward (womens)

Hooker - football interior line, wrestler, or baseball second base, short stop

Second Row - Consists of #4 and #5, the second row (or lock forwards) who steady the scrummage platform and provide the power drive when the ball comes in. Usually they are the jumpers in lineouts, so they tend to be the biggest in the scrum.

Football tight end, tackle, heavier wrestlers, basketball power forwards, baseball 1st base

Back row - Left and right flankers (#6 & #7, also called wing forwards or breakaways) and the number eight (#8). These positions are the most active on the pitch. Defensively they are always after the ball to cause the opposition to breakdown, so speed, stamina and tackling ability are prerequisites.

Flankers: linebackers, mid/heavy wrestlers, basketball guard/forwards

#8: Football tight ends, basketball centers/forwards, heavyweight wrestlers

Halfbacks - The Scrum Half (#9) must work in perfect timing with three other players for a successful team: the hooker when placing the ball into the scrummage, the #8 when taking the ball from the base of the scrummage, and with the flyhalf to whom he passes. Scrum halves come in all shapes and sizes, but are all quick and tenacious. They run the

offense since they communicate with both the forwards and backs at all times. The #10 flyhalf (or outside half or stand off) must have sure hands and a quick mind.

#9: quarterbacks, point guards, soccer midfielders/light wrestlers

#10: quarterbacks, flankers, point guards, soccer midfielders

Centers - #12, #13; these two players must tackle like linebackers and run like tailbacks. They must be able to take punishment from the defense in order to keep the ball available to the back row support to maintain possession.

Best comparison: Football running backs

Wings - Generally the speed merchants of the team. The objective is to give #11 or #14 the ball with space to maneuver. They must also field the opposition's kicks with sure hands and be prepared to counter attack.

Football flankers, soccer forwards or track sprinters

Fullback - The #15 is the man who may appear to do little, but has one of the most difficult positions on the field. Defensively he must be a sure tackler for he is the last line of defense. He must also field kicks well and either boot the ball back or link with the wings to counter attack. Offensively he should note weaknesses in the opposition and burst through the line of defense a appropriate times to exploit those weaknesses.

Football defensive back, soccer forwards