

Effecting the Touch



Touch - The clue's in the name!

As suggested in the sport's name, the 'touch' is an essential part of the game, a touch can be initiated by either the ball carrier or the defender however the rules of the game, and individual's skill level, will dictate how successfully this skill is performed. The rules of Touch, which do not allow players to travel beyond the 'mark' following a touch, mean that both the attackers and defenders should attempt to control where and when the touch happens.

From an attacker's perspective, they are looking to control the timing and location of the roll ball which is important to ensure continuity and flow when moving up the field or attacking the line, without conceding penalties or delaying play due to constantly overstepping the 'mark'.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, defenders want to control the timing and nature of the touch both to disrupt the attacking team and also to ensure they are well positioned to retreat after making the touch; minimising the risk of being caught offside and beaten by an attacking player.

The rules of the game allow defending players to make touches with either one or two hands on any part of the player including their boot or playing shirt. Excessive force or preventing the roll ball will result in a penalty; however interpretation of excessive force does vary between countries and referees. We have set out below some points to consider when effecting the touch from both an attacking and defensive perspective. This is not an exhaustive list but should help players understand and improve how they perform this vital skill under pressure.

Making a touch as a Defender:

On the attacking team score line: In this area of the field you are aiming to disrupt the attacking team and keep them pinned down in their own half. In this situation it is worth being a bit more direct by applying a two handed touch in front of the ball carrier. The aim is to interrupt the attacker's momentum and prevent them completing a roll ball alongside you. Be careful as excessive force and impacting a player's ability to perform a roll ball will result in a penalty. Keep your arms bent and use the attacking player's momentum to help initiate your retreat.

Mid field: In this area of the field, defenders should avoid getting caught up with the player completing the roll ball and ensure they are able to retreat quickly after making the touch. Aim to stay on your toes making touches in front of the attacker using their momentum to help initiate your retreat.

On your score line: When defending on your score line you need to be at your sharpest as a lapse in concentration and/or poor positioning will create opportunities for the attacking team to score. Always aim to make the touch with your inside arm on the outside shoulder of the attacking player. Stay on your toes ready to retreat quickly to your line. At this point in the game you want to avoid being caught up in the roll ball so you can retreat to your line as quickly as possible. At the higher level, defensive players will make the touch with their hips and feet positioned at an angle towards

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their score line to enable a rapid retreat. If you are able to make a touch inside the 5m line then you will have a shorter retreat to the line and reduce the risk of being beaten by an attacking player.

General Points:

- Avoid reaching across your body with the dominant arm when you could use the arm nearest the player and increase your range
- Don't lock your arm when making a touch as you are more likely to be penalised for excessive force
- Keep your weight on your toes to enable a rapid retreat and prevent getting caught up with the attacking player
- Call 'Touch' as you make the touch to help alert the referee that a touch has been made
- When moving forward to make a touch be sure to stay in front of the attacker and do not too over commit yourself to the touch in such a way that you get caught up in the roll ball
- Do not rush off your score line to make a touch on an attacker as you risk being beaten with a step.

Making a touch as an Attacker:

Don't wait to get touched, initiate the touch on the defender (reach out and touch them, performing the rollball at the same time). To the less experienced player, this will be an alien concept however, there is a skill to identifying whether gaps in defences are big enough to get through, or whether to initiate the touch and set up the next phase of play, keeping your team going forward quickly, without delay. Continually overstepping the mark will give the defending team time to re-organise and at worse will lead to penalties. Hesitation and delay in initiating the touch will also slow play down allowing defences to re-organise.

- Aim to initiate a touch so that you can complete a roll ball alongside a defending player as opposed to directly in front of them
- Protect the ball by keeping it in the hand furthest away from the defender and initiate the touch with the nearer hand
- Keep your head up when initiating the touch so you can see what is happening - a Voluntary Rollball, performing the rollball without a touch, is a penalty offence.
- When attacking the score line aim to initiate the touch just outside the 5m line (i.e. 7 or 8m out). Most referees will make the defending team retreat back to the score line increasing your attacking opportunity