

New Year's Day saw the introduction of new scrummaging rules designed to improve player safety in rugby union.

The International Rugby Board passed a law late last year to bring packs closer and reduce the force on impact.

From 1 January, referees at all levels will implement a new four-stage "crouch, touch, pause, engage" process.



Dr Syd Millar insists the scrum is still an integral part of the game

In addition to the engagement sequence, front rows cannot engage with their head and shoulders lower than their hips in a bid to stop collapsed scrums.

The IRB investigated the safety of the scrum following recommendations made by the organisation's medical committee, but rejected calls to follow rugby league and "de-power" the set-piece.

Another key difference to the current sequence is that the two props have to touch their opposition number's shoulder.

Before the two packs - which at Test level can weigh in the region of 120 stone each - often charged into contact from as much as three feet away?

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Jason Leonard
Former England prop

IRB chairman Dr Syd Millar insisted the contested scrum remained central to the sport.

"An essential element of rugby is its physicality," he said.

"This has to be appropriately balanced with the welfare of participating players and the IRB continues to take such issues very seriously.

"The IRB believes that the contested scrum is an integral part of the game and that rugby is unique in that its playing charter provides the opportunity for individuals of all shapes and sizes to play the game.

"That said, we have taken expert medical and technical advice that indicates that it is now appropriate for the game to adopt a less vigorous scrum engagement sequence."

Former England international Jason Leonard, the world's most capped prop, assisted the Law Project Group in its review of the scrum.

He said: "This new engagement sequence will standardise the distance the two sets of forwards are apart, reduce the collision at engagement and will assist in ensuring that both sets of forwards are at the best horizontal height possible.

"This is crucial to the successful engagement of the scrum.

"With the reduced impact, and forwards at the correct height, we will see an associated improvement in the bind.

"This should also assist in minimising collapsing of the front row. It also ensures that the scrum remains a true contest, which is important for the game.

"It in no way impairs both teams' ability to contest for the ball."