

Guidelines on Excessive Hits And Blind-side blocks

I. Defenseless players

Rule 9-4-3g has been given additional language to eliminate what are considered excessive blocks on what are considered defenseless players.

Defenseless players are covered under 2-33-16 in the Definitions:

“A defenseless player is a player who, because of his physical position and focus of concentration, is especially vulnerable to injury.”

9-4-3g: “Make any other contact with an opponent, including a defenseless player, which is deemed unnecessary or excessive and which incites roughness.”

The meat of what the rules-makers were trying to legislate comes under the Points of Emphasis on pages 92-93 of the rulebook. A key sentence of which is:

“Considering the potential for serious injury, it is critical that those situations involving unnecessary or excessive contact on players are eliminated whether or not that contact is otherwise deemed legal.”

We have to be conscious of these characteristics:

1. The player making the block on the defenseless player is in a “hunter” mode, looking to line-up a player;
2. The block is a peel-back block where a blocker is heading back toward his own end line;
3. A head-down shoulder thrust, dip and thrust, drive, or launch is used to deliver a blow.

These can happen on sweeps to the wide side, especially, plays along the sideline and on return plays, whether they are kick returns or interception returns.

THESE ARE FOULS

Players are encouraged to use an open-hand-style technique in these types of situations, where you “get the player out of the play, but not out of the game.”

When talking about receivers in a vulnerable position, the shoulder-first, head-down blow by a defensive player when timed with the pass, or used after the pass is obviously overthrown or underthrown is a foul.

Coaches have to be reminded that the “play until the whistle” philosophy is to be discouraged. The play is over when it is over by rule, not when the whistle blows. A late hit or unnecessary hit can be called.

II. Blind-side blocks

The guideline for determining a blind-side block corresponds with the definition of a defenseless player: his “*physical position and focus of concentration*” prohibit his seeing the approaching contact.

On page 93 of the rulebook, the official is asked to answer three questions when determining the legality of a blind-side block:

Does the player have a legitimate chance to make a play?

Does the player receive a blind-side block?

Was the contact unnecessary?

Four variations are given:

If the answer is yes to all three, it is a foul.

If the answer is yes to the first two but not the third, the play is legal.

If the answer is Yes to the first, and No to the remaining two it is legal.

If the answer is No to the first, but **yes or no** on the remaining two, it is a foul for unnecessary roughness.

Remember: Legal blocks can be determined as fouls if the contact is excessive or unnecessary.

Summary Guidelines:

A block/contact is considered a foul and includes (but is not limited to):

1. Head-down, shoulder-first blind-side blocks to punish (light him up) a player rather than move that player out of the play;
2. Head-down, shoulder-first peel-back blocks using this type of technique may be prone to foul, especially on blind-side blocks;
3. Head-down shoulder-first blocks given near the sideline as a runner moves toward that sideline and are made to punish (light him up) rather than move a player;
4. Blocks made by offensive or defensive players after a play is legally over, whether or not the whistle has sounded;
5. Defensive players hitting defenseless receivers with a head-down, shoulder-first hit when a hands-first, tackling-style would be effective.

*A defenseless receiver that is airborne receiver or one who has not established himself as a runner by making a football move (alighting to the ground and making a football move).

THESE ARE FOULS

6. Officials should err on the side of safety when making these determinations.

The CKFOA will review these guidelines with the officials and have this as part of their Officiating Portfolio and to make coaches aware of these guidelines as they enter the season.

This is going to be a learning curve for officials and coaches. Plays that were once considered standout may now be illegal.

The Points of Emphasis regarding excessive or unnecessary contact are not suggestions, but directives from the rules committee and were written as such and should be considered part of the rule and its interpretation.