

Dear Colleagues,

I apologise for the fact that this is a bit late. I've been very busy since returning from the World Games a couple of weeks ago. This edition contains unusual plays from Round 10, the week before last. As soon as I get this one done, I'll start work on Edition No. 11, which hopefully will follow shortly.

RUNNING INTO THE KICKER

During a game in Round 10, the punter was quite forcibly bumped (i.e. "run into" in the ordinary meaning of the words) by a defensive player after he kicked the ball. However, notwithstanding the hopes and expectations of the kicker, this was not a foul, because it was well after the kicker had regained his balance. The kicker only gets protection as a kicker until he has had a reasonable time to regain his balance after kicking the ball. After that point in time, he becomes just like any other player.

However...

That doesn't mean he is fair game for unnecessary roughness just because he has regained his balance after kicking the ball. Any player (including someone who has just kicked the ball) is protected from being "cleaned up" when he is obviously out of the play. If the kick is long gone, the punter is making no attempt to become involved in the play and it is obvious that he is not involved in the play, then extremely forcible contact (that usually equates to knocking him over) is likely to be flagged as a personal foul - not for roughing the kicker, but for unnecessary roughness. Because the bump in Round 10 could not be ruled running in to kicker, and was not forcible enough to be considered a personal foul for unnecessary roughness against a player not involved in the play, there was no foul.

FACEMASK DURING FUMBLE

During a game in Round 10 there was a fumble, and while the ball was loose a defensive player grasped (but did not twist, turn or pull) the facemask of an opponent. The ball was recovered by the defense. However, the ball went back to the offense, and a 5-yard penalty was enforced from the spot of the fumble.

This highlights the one of the reasons why officials drop a beanbag when they see a fumble. The beanbag does not signify, necessarily, that there has been a fumble. It is designed to mark the spot of the fumble in case it becomes an enforcement spot, and this was the case during Round 10. In most cases (depending on the type of play and the type of foul) the basic spot for enforcement of a penalty is from the "end of the related run". If the foul occurs while the ball is loose from a fumble, the end of the related run is the spot of the fumble. Hence, the penalty against the defense is enforced from the spot of the fumble, giving the ball back to the offense.

ILLEGAL FORMATION

As most people know, it is a foul if the offense begins a play with less than 7 men on the line of scrimmage. Of course, it's not really practical for the wing officials to try to count the number of men on the line of scrimmage, because they are all lined up from the point of view of the official. Hence, the officials count the number of men in the backfield. If they find 4 players in the backfield, plus the quarterback, giving a total of 5, then we either have less than 7 men on the line of scrimmage OR 12 men on the field. Many people, erroneously, believe that the foul is for having 5 men in the backfield.

However, in an unusual twist during one game in Round 10, we had 4 men in the backfield but only 10 men on offense, meaning that there were only 6 men on the line of scrimmage. It is legal for the offense to play with 10, and if the player missing is a backfield player, then there is no problem (legally, if not strategically). If the missing player is a lineman (which includes tight ends and wide receivers meant to be on the line of scrimmage) then we have a problem.

DEFENSIVE PASS INTERFERENCE

This is a very complicated rule and often a source of confusion.

During one game in Round 10 a defensive player appeared to be going for the ball - not the receiver - but still got flagged for pass interference. We often say that both players have equal rights to the ball and incidental contact, as long as both players are going for the ball, is not a foul. However, the key word here is incidental. If one player clearly has front position another player cannot make forcible contact with him in his attempts to get to the ball, if that prevents (or could have prevented) the opportunity for his opponent to catch the pass. He cannot "play through" his opponent from behind to get to the ball, which is what happened during Round 10.

That means that if your opponent has front position, you have to go around him to get the ball. You can't go "through" him to get to the ball.

This applies to both offensive and defensive players once the ball is in flight. Contact by the offense is also prohibited before the ball is thrown.

That's all for now. I'll get cracking on the next edition immediately.