

**Coaches Newsletter Vol.5 No.5**  
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MOUTHGUARDS

We are still having problems with equipment, which shouldn't be happening at this stage of the season. One player last weekend, when asked to show that he was wearing a mouthguard, showed a piece of denture 3 teeth wide stuck in the front of his mouth! Do I really have to point out that this is not an acceptable mouthguard? I would have thought that everyone knows what a mouthguard is. The rule book defines it as an "intra-oral mouthpiece of any readily visible colour (not white or transparent)... that covers all upper teeth". The officials will take action if they see something amiss, but it is the responsibility of coaches - not officials - to ensure that all players are equipped with all required equipment.

ROUGHING THE PASSER

We had several fouls for roughing the passer last weekend. Players must understand that it is "hands off" as soon as the pass is thrown. If contact is unavoidable because the player is almost on top of the passer when the pass is thrown, and contact is legal, it probably won't be flagged, but some players clearly think that this gives them a "window of opportunity" to get a free hit on the quarterback if they can get there sufficiently quickly after the pass is thrown. Unless they immediately try to avoid or minimise contact as soon as the pass is thrown, they are likely to fall foul of the rules. We know how quickly and easily contact can be avoided, because the fair players manage to do it all the time.

INELIGIBLE PLAYERS IN THE BACKFIELD

I have frequently discussed the issue of ineligibly-numbered players reporting as eligible and vice versa. Without going into a great level of detail again, the bottom line is that an eligibly-numbered player can report as an ineligible interior lineman in order to satisfy the requirement of having at least 5 ineligible numbers on the line of scrimmage, but ineligibly-numbered players can NEVER report as eligible. There are just a couple of additional points related to this issue from the weekend.

An ineligibly-numbered player can play in an otherwise eligible position (i.e. on the end of the line or in the backfield) any time he wants.

He doesn't need to report in. He just has to remember that, because of his number, he remains ineligible - i.e. he cannot cross the line of scrimmage during a play in which a legal forward pass crosses the neutral zone until after the pass is thrown.

We had an eligibly-numbered player report in as the long snapper on a field-goal attempt. This is not required. The requirement for 5 ineligibly-numbered players on the line of scrimmage does not apply if the offense is in a scrimmage-kick formation. However, the 5 interior linemen remain ineligible by position in the event that the play becomes a pass play.

#### CLARIFICATION FROM LAST WEEK

Last week we had an unusual play whereby there was an illegal forward pass (from beyond the line of scrimmage) and we also had a flag for an ineligible player downfield. In explaining the ruling I said that there was only one foul, because eligibility rules only apply to plays where there is a legal forward pass.

A correspondent has asked whether the flag for an ineligible player downfield should have been thrown in the first place. The answer is no - in theory it should not have been thrown because there was no foul.

However, it often happens that a flag is waved because additional information that was not available to the flagging official makes the action legal.

Waved flags don't always mean that a mistake has been made - sometimes it means that a final ruling has been made based on complete information. For example, a flag for pass interference might be waved once the flagging official finds out that the pass was touched at the line of scrimmage or was an illegal forward pass.

In the case last week, the wing official on the far side of the field was not and should have been aware that the pass was illegal, because it was close to the far sideline. He was not and should not have been watching the player with the ball, but was taking care of business on his side of the field, as is only right and proper.