

Coaches Newsletter Vol.5 No. 6
26 July 2005

Round 6

Once again, a couple of unusual plays and a couple of enforcement questions from Round 6.

KICKING TEAM PLAYER OUT OF BOUNDS

If a member of the kicking team voluntarily goes out of bounds during a scrimmage kick or free kick down, and then returns inbounds during the down, this is a foul (5 yards from the previous spot). If he is blocked out of bounds, it is not a foul as long as he attempts to return inbounds immediately. During Round 6, a player was blocked out of bounds but then fouled because he returned inbounds but did not attempt to do so immediately.

Officials understand that a player's momentum is probably causing him to go forward, and therefore he cannot stop his forward motion in a split second in order to literally return inbounds immediately. However, the key is that he must **ATTEMPT** to do so immediately, subject to the constraints of his existing forward momentum. If he takes a number of steps parallel to the sideline before he starts to move back toward the field of play (as was the case on the weekend) that is a foul. The idea is that he is taking advantage of ground outside the field of play to get around the receiving team player.

EARLY MOVEMENT BY BACKFIELD PLAYERS

Every time a backfield player makes any movement that appears to indicate that he has missed the snap count, we get calls for a false start. Can we finally put this one to rest? Backfield players are not restricted in that they can go in motion, and therefore these kinds of movements are often similar to the movements a player make when he goes in motion. Sure, when he goes in motion, he keeps moving, but he doesn't have to! If he moves early, and then resets, there is no foul unless the officials believe that he is simulating the start of play, and this is rare. He would basically have to charge toward the line of scrimmage to simulate the start of play. As long as he stops moving before the snap (or if he doesn't stop moving, as long as he is not moving forward at the snap and the whole team has set for one second since the last shift) then there is no foul.

I know that this is a controversial issue and it is possible that Officials' Associations in some states disagree with this interpretation. If you are outside Victoria, perhaps this should be clarified between your League and your Officials' Association, and I apologise for raising a controversial issue. But it is important that Victorian teams, at least, understand that this is the interpretation used in Victoria. I believe that there are even differences in the interpretation of this rule between college conferences in the US. However, we have been trained by very experienced US college referees and their attitude is basically that "a back cannot false start!". Okay, in exceptional circumstances,

as described above, they can, but this is extremely rare and this is the point that they are making. Coaches who want a cheap 5 yards because a back makes an early movement are going to be disappointed. The defense should be keying on the ball and the interior linemen in order to work out when the play has started.

DELAY OF GAME

Normally a delay of game is a 5-yard penalty, but it can be a 10 or 15-yard penalty. We had one of these in Round 6.

If the game is delayed because the home team fails to fulfil its requirements, that is a 10-yard penalty. The only specific responsibility of the home team in our League is the requirement to provide a chain crew. The chain crew must make themselves available so that they can be briefed by the Linesman at least 15 minutes before the scheduled kick-off. In one game last weekend, they wandered down to the field a minute or two before kick-off. This is not good enough. The start of the game was delayed a few minutes and the home team were penalised 10 yards.

If either half is delayed because either team is not ready in time, that is a 15-yard delay of game penalty.

INADVERTENT WHISTLES (IW's)

The dreaded bugbear of officiating! We abhor them and try our best to avoid them, but they do happen on occasion. Since we had 2 in one game in Round 6, I guess now is a good time to discuss what happens after an inadvertent whistle - especially because we got two different outcomes last weekend.

If the IW occurs during a legal forward pass, there is no option. The down is replayed. That is what happened during the first IW on the weekend. (The same applies if the IW occurs during a kick).

If the IW occurs while the ball is in player possession, the team in possession has the option of replaying the down or putting the ball in play where it was when the whistle was blown. If this option is chosen, the effect of the IW (from a rules point of view) is simply that the down has ended early. This is what happened during the second IW on the weekend. Since the offense had gained a first down before the whistle was blown, their choice was obvious and there was no point asking them to choose. They next put the ball in play, first and 10, at the spot the ball was where the whistle was blown.

For completeness, there are two other possible scenarios:

If the IW occurs when the ball is loose from a fumble, a backward pass or an illegal forward pass, the team that was last in possession has the option of replaying the down or taking the ball at the spot where possession was lost. (This is one of the reasons that we bag the spot of a fumble).

If the IW occurs after a change of possession on a try, the try is over.

However, irrespective of IWs, all fouls are still enforced.

PERSONAL FOULS ON TOUCHDOWN PLAYS AND TRIES

Normally when there is a foul the offended team has the choice of accepting the penalty or declining the penalty and accepting the result of the play. A touchdown play is an exception. If there is a personal foul by opponents of the scoring team during a down that ends in a touchdown, the scoring team gets to keep the touchdown and has the option of having the penalty enforced on the try or on the kick-off.

If there is a personal foul during a try, however, the offended team has to decline the penalty in order to keep the point or points. If they accept the penalty, the try is repeated. This is what happened during one game in Round 6. (By the way, even though fouls are declined in order to keep the points, they are still recorded for ladder tie-break purposes and flagrant fouls still require disqualification).

However, if the personal foul on a try is against the snapper, the kicker, the holder or the passer, then the penalty DOES carry over to the kick-off.

Simple, huh?

Until we next meet...

Regards,

Tony