

Coaches Newsletter Vol.5 No. 7
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WEEK 7

Although I wasn't at any of the games in Round 7, my colleagues have apprised me of a few interesting situations for inclusion in the newsletter, so here goes.

FUMBLE DURING A KICK RETURN
RECOVERY BY OUT OF BOUNDS PLAYER
FUMBLE FORWARD OUT OF BOUNDS

All of these issues were brought up during the opening kick-off for Round 7.

I have often said in these newsletters that when a kicking team player recovers a kick, the ball is dead immediately. He cannot advance the ball. However, in this sport definitions are important. A "kick" describes the status of the ball between the time it is legally kicked and the time it is recovered. If it is recovered by the receiving team, it continues in play but it ceases to be a "kick" - it becomes a running play. Hence, if the receiving team player fumbles the ball, or there is an incomplete backward pass, the kicking team CAN recover and advance the ball. This is what happened last weekend - at least, a receiving team player fumbled the ball and therefore the kicking team became eligible to recover and advance.

The ball was recovered by a kicking team player while he had his foot on the sideline. Let's review what it is that causes a loose ball to go out of bounds. It goes out of bounds when it touches the ground, a player, an official or anything else that is out of bounds. Since the player standing on the sideline was, by definition, out of bounds, as soon as he touched the ball in the process of recovering it the ball went out of bounds, and if a fumble goes out of bounds it belongs to the fumbling team. Tough luck for the kickers!

The final issue concerns the fact that the out-of-bounds spot - the spot of the ball when touched by the out-of-bounds player - was in advance of the spot of the fumble. If the fumble goes backward out of bounds, the fumbling team get the ball at the out-of-bounds spot. If it goes forward out of bounds, the fumbling team get it back at the spot of the fumble - i.e. they get the worst of the two spots. That is one of the reasons why officials drop bean-bags when there is a fumble - not to indicate that there has been a fumble but to mark the spot in case it is needed in a case such as this.

RECOVERY BY RECEIVING TEAM AFTER ILLEGAL TOUCHING OF SCRIMMAGE KICK

A couple of weeks ago I went to great pains to explain that if the kicking team touch a scrimmage kick it does not kill the play. It is just illegal touching, which gives the receiving team the option of taking the ball at the spot of the touch if there are no accepted penalties on the play. If the kicking team want to kill the play, they must PICK UP the ball.

During Round 7 a kicking team player (clearly someone who has not had the benefit of the wisdom contained in these missives) placed his hand on the ball after a scrimmage kick, thinking that this would kill the play. An alert receiving team player then recovered the ball and started to run with it. Great play so far. Unfortunately he started to run toward his own end zone - i.e. the end zone his team is meant to be defending. As his team-mates were yelling at him to run the other way, he took the ball into his own end zone, almost got tackled there, but managed to get back into the field of play and advance to the 25-yard line. I don't know whether or not there was a net gain on the return.

Normally a player who takes the ball into his own end zone and gets tackled there gives up a safety. However, even if that had happened (as long as there were no accepted penalties on the play) the receiving team would have got the ball at the spot of illegal touching. If there had been an accepted penalty, anything is possible, depending on the type of penalty and the enforcement spot.

ELIGIBLE NUMBERS ON THE INTERIOR LINE

I have often explained what is or is not possible in terms of eligible numbers in ineligible positions, and vice versa. In summary, ineligibly-numbered players can never report as eligible. They can play anywhere they like, but they can never be eligible. If, as a result of injury, a team needs to play an eligibly-numbered player on the interior line to satisfy the requirement of at least 5 ineligible players on the line of scrimmage, this will be permitted.

It is possible that, when discussing this issue in newsletters, I may not have included the words "if as a result of injury" on every occasion. However, this is clearly stated in the official GV rules that have been given to every coach.

The purpose of my comment here is to remind coaches of this provision. The relaxation of the normal rule has been the case for some time in this country because we have small squads and sometimes teams run out of linemen because of injury. The rule has not been relaxed to allow coaches to take advantage of it for strategic purposes. There is a feeling that this is starting to happen. The relaxation of the rule is a privilege that may be withdrawn if it is abused.

ABUSE OF CLUB OFFICIALS

It has been reported to me that during one game a coach questioned the integrity of a club official. That is a serious concern.

I understand perfectly well that coaching is an emotional job and coaches often have things to say about officials and their calls. I also understand that some coaches will try to "work" the officials, which basically means that they complain about calls in a strategic fashion in the hope (in my opinion, the unfounded hope) that this will benefit their team in future calls.

We try to manage this as best we can. We give feedback if it is requested in a reasonable fashion, we ignore the complaints and we penalise the abuse when it goes too far. Depending on how it is expressed, we are reasonably tolerant if a coach questions our ability or our judgement. We're just doing the best we can out there, as are the coaches and players, and sometimes we get it wrong.

However, when you question our integrity, you have crossed the line. Not because we have thin skins, but because you are threatening the integrity of the sport itself. If you question the integrity of a any official, you can expect a flag for the slightest infraction. We'll just move the ball 15 yards and then continue the game. However, it is even more serious if you question the integrity of a club official, because now you are placing the viability of our League in danger! Our games could not be officiated without their help. By and large they do a fine job, and I am absolutely certain that none have ever shown any reason to doubt their integrity as officials. Before you take a cheap shot at them out of frustration, think about what it potentially means to the game if we can't use them because you have placed a cloud over the use of club officials.