

Coaches Newsletter Vol. 5 No. 2
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Dear Colleagues,

There were no particularly unusual plays in Round 2, but there are quite a number of points that, although they have all been covered before, clearly need reinforcing.

EQUIPMENT

Although we got certifications from all 6 coaches that all players were equipped according to rule, in one case either the coach had made no attempt to instruct players on what equipment to wear or his players totally disregarded anything he had to say on the matter. This team burned 4 timeouts because of missing tailbone protectors, hip pads and a mouthguard. The player without a mouthguard said that he never wears a mouthguard! The officials do their best to police this rule, but given that some teams have over 50 players, it is not their responsibility to ensure that players are properly equipped. That is the coach's responsibility.

INELIGIBLES DOWNFIELD

One player was penalised more than once for being illegally downfield on a pass play. I understand he is a rookie, and it takes time to get all the rules across to new players, but if it helps, here is a summary of the relevant rule.

An "eligible receiver" is defined as a player on his line of scrimmage who is on the end of the line, or a player in the backfield, who is numbered other than 50 through 79. The quarterback, although not technically in the backfield (see the next section) is also an eligible receiver. This means that all interior linemen (irrespective of number) are ineligible, and all players numbered 50 through 79 (irrespective of position) are ineligible.

The above paragraph is ALWAYS true, and cannot be changed by "reporting".

An ineligible player may not cross the line of scrimmage during a play in which a forward pass crosses the neutral zone until the pass has been thrown. The exception is an interior lineman who initiates contact within 1 yard of the line of scrimmage. He may continue, so long as contact is maintained, up to 3 yards beyond the line of scrimmage.

ON-THE-LINE / OFF-THE-LINE

We had a number of penalties in Round 2 for illegal formation (less than 7 men on the line of scrimmage) or ineligible players downfield (because the tight end was "covered" by a wide receiver on the line).

There are several possible explanations for this. Most people seem to have an intuitive idea of the difference between being on the line and

in the backfield, but may not know the precise rule. Some players clearly did not know whether they were meant to be on or off the line - clearly they need more instruction in this. The fact that the field for Round 2 was appallingly marked also doesn't help. The officials try to take this into account as much as they can, but if a formation is clearly illegal there is a limit as to how much tolerance can be given.

A player is on the line if his head breaks the plane of the line drawn through the snapper's waist. A player is off the line (i.e. in the backfield) if NO part of him breaks the plane of the line drawn through the rearmost portion (other than the legs or feet) of the nearest player who is on the line. In other words, looking across the field, there must be daylight between the backfield player and the backside of the nearest lineman. The quarterback is an exception to this.

A player who is neither on the line (because his head does NOT break the plane drawn through the snapper's waist) nor in the backfield (because he DOES overlap with the nearest lineman) is colloquially referred to be being in "no man's land". As long as there is no advantage being gained, this is not flagged in our League. The player is warned to move up (if he is supposed to be on the line) or back (if his supposed to be off the line). He may be flagged if he ignores repeated warnings.

It is critically important that wide receivers look at the nearest wing official, who will be signalling to the other wing official the status of the widest receiver. (Hand on the chest means the widest receiver is on the line. Hand outstretched toward the offensive backfield means the widest receiver is off the line). Although these signals are designed for communication amongst the officials, they should be used by the receivers and can be relied upon. There should always be a positive signal one way or the other. In all cases of illegal formation or covered tight ends going downfield in Round 2, if (a) the widest receiver knew where he should have been, and (b) he had looked for this signal and adjusted accordingly, the foul would not have been called.

If there are 2 or 3 wide receivers on one side, the 2nd or 3rd man in do not get the benefit of a signal. If they ask for confirmation of their position from the official, and there is time to give feedback, it will be given.

There is no signal for the widest receiver lining up in the neutral zone - or rather, the signal is a yellow flag in the air. Wing officials will try to get the receiver to move back if there is time. The receiver should rely on the nearest leg of the wing official as an indication of where their line of scrimmage is. Wide receivers who take position and then bend forward should give themselves a bit more room, lest they lean into the neutral zone.

MOVEMENT BY INTERIOR LINEMEN

An interior lineman (i.e. a lineman who is not on the end of the line) is also referred to as a restricted lineman. Once his hands have been placed below his knees, he may not move them or make any quick, jerky movement. Minor adjustments of position are usually ignored if they do not simulate the start of play, but the best way to avoid a penalty is for restricted linemen to remain still until the snap.

RUNNING INTO / ROUGHING THE KICKER

In Round 2 a scrimmage kick was partially blocked by a receiving team player, who then contacted the kicker. The flag was waved because a receiving team player who touches the ball is excused from running into or roughing the kicker. This does NOT mean that he has a free shot at the kicker (or the holder, in the case of a field goal attempt). The idea is that a player who attempts to block the ball but does NOT make contact with the ball will be penalised if he runs into or roughs the kicker or holder. If he DOES make contact with the ball, and then makes contact with the kicker or holder, he will not be penalised for running into or roughing. However, after making contact with the ball, he then deliberately and unnecessarily punishes the kicker or holder, he will probably be penalised for unnecessary roughness, which is a different personal foul from roughing the kicker but carries the same penalty.

TAUNTING

We had 2 very similar situations in Round 2, in both of which a player, after laying a particularly successful tackle, yelled loudly. One was penalised for Unsportsmanlike Conduct, one was not. It is understandable that some players were confused and complained about the apparent inconsistency.

It all boils down to the difference between celebration and taunting. If a player yells out loudly and it is seen by the officials as a genuine act of celebration, this will not be penalised. If it is seen to be taunting or in any way demeaning or degrading to the opponent, it may result in a warning (depending on the severity) or a penalty. If the yelling is clearly directed AT the opponent, it is more likely to result in action by the officials - especially if it is directed downward toward the victim of the tackle who is still on the ground.

All that can be asked is that players respect the officials' judgement as to which side of the line a given action falls. It is a very tough call to make and the officials will use their judgement as well as they possibly can. It would be even better if players kept their celebrating to within the huddle and focussed on football during and immediately after all live-ball action.