

Dear Colleagues,

This is the first of the VGOA Coaches Newsletters for 2005.

The purpose of the Coaches Newsletter is to bring to your attention any incidents during GV games that may indicate some confusion or lack of knowledge regarding rules or interpretations on the part of coaches or players. Often these will include unusual plays where an explanation of the rules might be useful. Sometimes we have limited time to explain the rules during the actual game. This allows these situations to be explained more fully, and brings everyone into the loop rather than just the teams concerned in any particular game.

Under most circumstances these letters will be sent weekly, unless there are no particular situations to discuss or I am otherwise prevented from sending out the newsletter.

The distribution list for this email has grown substantially over the years. It is formally addressed to the senior coaches, but it is cc'd to members of the VGOA, the AGOA, the GV Committee of Management and accredited club officials. If you receive this and don't want to, I apologise and please let me know. If you know of anyone who you think would like to receive it, please let me know. Some of you may receive more than one copy of this email if you appear on more than one of my lists - if so, I apologise for any inconvenience.

If I highlight incidents that indicate lack of knowledge of the rules on the part of players, it is expected that coaches will pass this information on to the players. Occasionally in the past I have put the effort in to explain the rules to coaches, only to see or hear actions or comments by players that clearly indicate that they still have been told the correct rules.

These newsletters will be posted on the GV website, although there may be a short delay before this occurs. Please encourage your players to check the website regularly for updates. I also plan to post relevant and useful comments from newsletters in previous years (although this might take me a little while to achieve). I hope you find the newsletters interesting and useful.

The newsletters will probably not normally have any particular theme, but the theme for this edition is the word "safety".

#### SAFETY No. 1

There are two comments today on the subject of safety. The first relates to the fact that a team scored a safety during Round 1. Not only are safeties unusual, but the way in which this one was scored was particularly unusual, and therefore I think it would be useful to review what is required for a safety to be scored.

Whenever the ball is goes out of bounds behind the goal line (e.g. goes through the end zone) or is declared dead in the end zone, it is either a touchdown, a touchback or a safety.

If it is dead in the end zone in the possession of the attacking team, it is a touchdown. In all other situations it is a touchback or a safety, and the difference between the two depends on who is responsible for the ball being in the end zone. Responsibility is charged to the team that carries the ball into the end zone or that last gave "impetus" to the ball. Impetus is given by snapping, passing, kicking, fumbling or batting the ball. Impetus is NOT given by a player who deflects the ball in any direction in an attempt to possess the ball. This may include deflecting it with the hand or foot. This does not constitute batting or kicking. Batting and kicking are defined as intentional acts.

During Round 1, a scrimmage kick was blocked and a member of the receiving team inadvertently propelled the ball toward, and through, the kicking team's end zone. The covering official ruled that the ball was not batted or kicked, but was deflected on a number of occasions in a genuine attempt to possess the ball. Hence, impetus was imparted by the kicking team when they kicked the ball, and no impetus was given after that time. By rule, the kicking team were responsible for the ball being in the end zone, and hence the receiving team were awarded a safety.

## SAFETY No. 2

The other meaning of this word is that I want to highlight is player safety. Although we have relaxed some of the NCAA rules relating to cosmetic appearance of uniforms (e.g. advertising), ALL NCAA rules relating to safety equipment are strictly enforced. The only exception is that football boots that are considered acceptable in other codes of football such as Australian Rules Football, rugby and soccer are permissible even if they don't strictly comply with the NCAA requirements. Damaged cleats, exposed nails or screws, or any other dangerous features on boots are still completely unacceptable, just as they are in the other football codes.

All head coaches are required to certify before the game that their players:

- (a) Have been informed what equipment is mandatory by rule and what constitutes illegal equipment.
- (b) Have been provided the equipment mandated by rule.
- (c) Have been instructed to wear and how to wear mandatory equipment during the game.
- (d) Have been instructed to notify the coaching staff when equipment becomes illegal through play during the game.

The Umpire, when he asks for this certification, will probably not read the above 4 aspects of certification word for word. He may simply ask the head coach if all players are equipped according to rule. That is an abbreviated way of asking for the above certification. The game cannot start without certification from both coaches, and once given the head coach is responsible for ensuring that all players are and remain equipped according to rule. Teams WILL be penalised if they commit violations relating to safety equipment, and it is not acceptable for coaches to complain about that.

If an official believes that a player is missing a piece of mandatory equipment, he will try, if possible, to bring this to the player's attention before the next snap. The player will then have to fix the problem. There will be no penalty but the game will not be interrupted allow him to do this. However, it is often difficult to be sure whether equipment is missing and officials will normally let a play run and then check after the play whether the equipment is in fact missing. For example, a mouthguard dangling from a facemask will generally not result in the play being stopped, because it could be a borrowed helmet and the player could have another mouthguard in his mouth. The game will only be interrupted in the case of an emergency - e.g. a player is missing his helmet or the official is certain he is not wearing a mouthguard.

If a player is found to have participated in a play without all mandatory equipment, or with illegal equipment, the team will be charged a time-out, and if they have already been charged 3 time-outs, they will be penalised for a delay of game.

Sometimes we have had recurring problems with players not wearing mouthguards. At other times we have had problems with players tying their shirts at the back or front. Not only does this give them unfair advantage, but more importantly it is dangerous. A tackler could get a finger caught in the knot, or the player could land on the knot, with potential damage to spine, kidneys, etc. The reason for mentioning the issue in this newsletter is that a number of players in Round 1 were found to be missing a tailbone protector.

Please follow up on this issue. There will be no relaxation of these rules.

#### LATE HITS

This obviously also relates to safety. We had a number of personal fouls in Round 1 as a result of players charging into opponents after they had crossed the sideline. It has been claimed that there were a number of rookies playing, but that doesn't excuse them not knowing the rules. A couple of players complained that they didn't hear a whistle. That is no excuse.

Some coaches and players talk about "playing to the whistle", and I have frequently talked about how unwise this advice is in previous newsletters. The whistle does not kill the play. The play kills the play. The whistle just helps communicate this to coaches, players and spectators who are not directly involved in the play, but those who are involved are expected to know when the ball is live and when it is dead. When the runner goes down, the play is over and the runner cannot be tackled, jumped on or otherwise punished. When the runner crosses the sideline, the play is over and he cannot be run into or tackled. It takes a period of time for the covering official to see that the runner is out of bounds, put his whistle to his mouth and blow it. If the runner is hit after he has crossed the line, that is a foul. The only exception is a tackler is committed to a block before the runner goes out of bounds, and contact is unavoidable. Obviously he can't stop or change direction in mid-air. But he is still required to avoid or minimise contact as much as possible.

If a runner steps ON the sideline but appears to still be in the field of play and running downfield, it is reasonable for defenders to try to tackle him until they hear a whistle. But most of the time runner goes ACROSS the sideline, and in that case it is the responsibility of all players to know where the sideline is and when the ball is dead.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about anything in this newsletter.

Regards,

Tony

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Tony Martin  
VGOA Training Officer

(Home) (03) 9486 6994  
(Work) (03) 9479 2664  
(Mobile) 0419 383 424