

EORU/EORRS Coach/Referee Think-tank 2005

EORRS position paper: Tackle/ruck...boots on the body (of a player on the wrong side)

Scenario:

- * Tackler & ball carrier go to ground.
- * Tackler releases the ball carrier.
- * Ball carrier releases the ball.
- * Both players roll away (separate from the ball to make it playable in reality).
- * Supporting players from each side arrive through 'the gate' & stay on their feet.
- * Players legally bound in the ruck contest for possession of the ball.

As we all know it doesn't always happen like that...

If a referee finds a body on the ground that prevents quick release of the ball that player(s) must immediately make an attempt to correct their improper positioning (does not always mean they will not be held accountable, ie. if their effort still becomes material to the play - reduces options of the team in possession of the ball).

Failure of the offending player to correct/comply with Law & their positioning becomes material then the referee will state & show advantage. If all options are eliminated for the non-offending team then a full penalty will occur against the offending side. Additional admonishment or card may be forthcoming depending on the incidence & nature of the foul. This gives the referee control of a significant area of risk and a potential flash point.

If the players take 'the law into their own hands' (actually boots) to remove the player using their boot(s) - the referee is entitled to reverse the penalty & apply appropriate sanctions. The referee terms of reference include, but are not limited to, where on the body of the offending player does the offending player make contact with their boots...RED rhymes with HEAD (upper half of the body)!

"Zero tolerance for Boot on Body", the law is clear...

16.3 (F) a player rucking for the ball must not ruck players on the ground. A player rucking for the ball tries to step over players on the ground and must not intentionally step on them. A player rucking must do so near the ball.

Also an April, 2005 IRB ruling supports this...

The IRFU has requested a ruling with regard Law 16-Ruck:

1. It basically states that rucking can occur as long as players are not in contravention of Law 10 Foul Play. In 16.3(f), is this then taken to mean that there are no exceptions or qualifications to the Law, and that rucking which is directed at a player to remove him as an obstruction or impediment to securing possession of the ball is illegal?
2. Can the Law also be taken to mean that so called 'mountain climbing' where a player is using his boots to climb on a players back/body, is illegal?
3. Can the Law also be taken to mean that rucking can only occur when a player is in a ruck and bound correctly {Law 16.2(b)} and that any player not caught in or bound in the ruck cannot be rucking for the ball and is therefore liable to penalty for Dangerous Play and Misconduct under Law 10.4(b) and/or (c) and/or 10.4(k).
4. Additionally, would inadvertent or unintentional contact with players in a ruck as an incident of legitimate rucking for the football (reckless and patently dangerous rucking apart) be considered legal and within the Laws of the Game?

The Designated Members have ruled the following in answer to the questions raised:

Rulings

1. Yes
2. Yes
3. Yes
4. Yes

Implications:

Referee

It is appropriate for Referees' to include a comment this in their pre-game briefing, ie. zero tolerance boots on bodies. Unfortunately, it is seen to often on TV Rugby and then many amateur players think it is allowed. However, at the amateur level, reversing a penalty & issuing a card (the real decision to be made by the referee, YELLOW or RED) as per your pre-game briefing usually eliminates this potential flash point from the remainder of the game.

As referees' we need to understand the importance being at the tackle to call the 1st offense, which may include the 3rd,4th, 5th etc. player going to ground on the wrong side of the ball (take quick intervention with a scrum re-start if this occurs as a result of the front rucking player being 'knocked over' by the arrival of their own supporting teammates - that is not a penalty) impeding access to the ball/preventing play is appropriately sanctioned to avoid conflict & potential flash point. If late taking off towards the next contact point, take a path that brings you to the tackle from 'head end'. Proactively cue players arriving to form/participate in the ruck properly, e.g. "stay on your feet".

Coach

Understandably referees may view anything slightly odd or unusual as an attempt to bend the laws...sometimes there is a genuine and decent reason for certain techniques to be coached, for example - ball carrier pushing the ball away from the body versus rolling away from the ball;

- 1) to play the ball away from the body area thus preventing any misreading of the situation by the referee regarding "lying on the ball".. the ball is clearly no where near the body.
- 2) to play the ball towards one's own team and away from the opposition, thus making the process of winning the ball easier (NOT guaranteed!)
- 3) to keep the hand on it because it encourages layers to PLACE the ball and not just throw it away or bounce the ball
- 4) to keep the hand on the ball because eyes looking forward cannot also be looking down. So hand on the ball means the unwatched feet cannot inadvertently waste good positive play by accidentally kicking the ball somewhere.

Coaches, consider including in your instruction to the players;

- 1) teach players to ruck beyond the ball & their own tackled player
- 2) to step over the bodies of those players in the tackle instead of on them
- 3) make/take all decision-making through the gate
- 4) exercise techniques that neutralize actions by the opposition to go to ground; forklift, scissors, storking (1 leg lift) etc.