



Whistle Talk

News from the British Columbia Rugby Referees' Society

Volume 2 ed 2

Stu Berry

Thanks to Scott Lebus for sending the link to a news story from South Africa. Stu Berry was involved in a traffic accident last week. While not seriously hurt, he was kept in the hospital for observation and treatment for a broken arm and lacerations. Stu came to Canada this past summer to be an AR for the Rugby Canada test matches with the USA, Italy and Georgia. While in Vancouver he met with the VFVRRS over a pint and shared his experiences on the IRB 7's circuit. The BCRRS has sent him our best wishes and hope for a complete and speedy recovery.

The Season Start-up

The teams and referees seem to be adapting to the new Law amendments.

At the Premier Men's level the scrums seem to be going well. There does seem to be problems at lower levels as the forwards and referees are rushing the engagement process. Referees are reminded to have enough time between each command for the players to complete the required actions... ie "crouch" = whole scrum bound, front rows crouched over and stable. "touch" = props touch their opponents on the point of the shoulder and pull their arms back... whole scrum is stable. "set" front rows can engage.

For the most part, the ball is being cleared from the base of rucks quickly. Referees should take care that they do allow a full 5 seconds after saying, "use it" .

There seem to be more "trash talking" or taunting between players this season. This behaviour creates a negative tone to the game and often leads to flash points. Referees need to act to deter such behaviour early... management at first and then penalty for repeated incidents.

Concussions

Concussions are a frightening aspect of rugby and have affected many player's lives. Everyone in the sport has a duty of care to prevent and properly treat injured players.

The IRB has published some excellent material on concussions. Their web site has in-depth educational modules and the IRB Guidelines (<http://www.irbplayerwelfare.com/>) . These guidelines describe the causes, steps for diagnosis and treatments for players suspected of having a concussion. It states the IRB policy of recommended time away from the game and the steps they should take before playing again (Graduated Return to Play). There also a detailed diagnostic aid called the Scat2 (Sport Concussion Assessment Tool 2). Using Scat2 makes it possible to make a more definitive decision about a player's concussion injury.

In the last year, the IRB has also introduced a trial of a protocol called the Pitch-Side Concussion Assessment (PSCA). The protocol has been used in some of the IRB tournaments and international matches. The IRB has given permission for the various unions to use it in the elite competitions so the RFU Premiership in the United Kingdom will begin using it next season.

The PSCA protocol allows a player to be taken from the field for a time period of 5 minutes so that they may have their suspected concussion evaluated. During this time a temporary replacement may come into the game... (its been called a "brain bin"). The protocol is:

- The recommendation to remove the player can be made by either the referee, the independent match day doctor or the team doctor from the player's team.
- Once that command is made, the referee will indicate that the player is leaving the field of play with a hand signal where he touches his head three times.
- Once the player has been removed from the field of play and temporarily replaced, the team and independent match doctors will proceed through an IRB pitch-side concussion assessment procedure incorporating standardised questions and observations.
- If the player fails any aspect of the assessment and has relevant symptoms he will not be able to return to the field of play and the substitution becomes permanent.

Will this protocol be used in BC rugby? **NOT** at the moment. The mechanics and ramifications of the protocol have not been ironed out. It is designed for elite (aka professional) and international competitions. Rugby Canada is reluctant to require that we use the protocol because it relies on well-trained medical staff (ie. match and team doctors).

SO for now it is up to all coaches and physios to take primary responsibility for the diagnosis and treatment of concussed players. They need to make themselves aware of the symptoms of concussion, use Scat2, remove concussed players from the game and ensure that medical personnel see them ie. a hospital. **BUT** if a referee has concerns about an injury to a player, they need to bring their concerns to the attention of the team's coaches and physios. Erring on the side of caution is the prudent decision.

Off-side at an open-field kick

One of the Law application guidelines that the IRB set up this season was for referees to be strict with players in front of a team-mate who had kicked the ball and (ie are off-side) who then interfered with an opponent taking a quick throw in.

While the goal of keeping a sneaky player from slowing down the game in this way seemed simple, the inquisitive minds of referees came up with some pertinent questions: If an off-side player did interfere with a quick throw in... what was he actually guilty of? and what should happen afterwards?

Was the player just off-side? Was the player guilty of preventing the throw-in? Was the player guilty of unfair play? Depending on the "crime", the resulting penalty kick or free kick could be in several locations.

After talking to the referee manager for Rugby Canada, it turns out that the accepted interpretation is that the player is to be penalized for being off-side. The situation is treated in the same way as if the kick hadn't gone into touch and the off-side player denied their

opponent their options to play the ball. I.e. any off-side players should be penalized if they move up the field and materially interfere with their opponent's play. In this special case, preventing the quick throw-in makes their being off-side material. (Reminder: the opposition would be given the option of a penalty kick where the player was off-side or a scrum where the ball was kicked)

SO, when a player kicks the ball ahead, referees need to scan the field to see which players are ahead of the kicker (and which are not). Referees should call out the team's colour and player's number and say "stop" or "wait". The off-side players must not move up the field until put on-side.

Off-side players who **do not** move up the field can be put on-side in several ways... i.e. if one of their "on-side" teammates runs past them, etc., etc. (see Law 11.2 and 11.3). If an opponent does take a quick throw-in, the off-side players are put on-side because of Law 11.3. Also if the kicked ball goes far into touch and out of the roped area it is considered to be "dead" which puts them on-side. If the ball is in touch but still playable, any off-side player is liable to penalty for off-side.

Oh to have a TMO !

During the Spring Bok's beat down on the Wallabies at Loftus Versfeld, there were two key decisions made by the TMO that gave me food for thought.

Zane Kirchner had a try called back because, despite his excellent body control and handling skills, as the ball was about 5 cm from being touched down, the heel of his left boot brushed the touch line. Earlier, the TMO had decided that the Spring Bok's Goosen had been tackled centimeters from the try line and that he was guilty of "double movement" when, micro-seconds later, he was pushed over the line by his arriving teammates.

What struck me was not whether the decisions were correct or not... (bring a six-pack and we can debate that!). Rather, I wondered what would have happened without the TMO and his HD, multi-camera, ultra-slow motion, video replays? What would referee Alan Roland and the assistant referees have ruled if left to their own views of the incident? Would they have been able to see what happened? Even with a clear view, would they have been able to visualize the micro-seconds between Kirchner's boot hitting the line and the ball being grounded? Would these highly trained, experienced, professional officials have "got it right"?

Who knows? But if the best rugby officials in the world need high tech equipment to call the game, what about "a weekend warrior" BC referee? All by themselves, in the rain and mud of a schoolyard pitch, with bodies flying, uniforms blanked out to the same dirty shade of brown and their ability to see events limited by the built-in frailties of human biology... what chance do they have? Happily, it is not that depressing. Within the limits of their humanity, BC referees (and even "elderly" assistant referees) get the calls right most of the time.

Referees work at their game as players do. Referees are as frustrated by their poor performances as are players. Not being in a good position to see hands in a ruck creates as much angst in a referee as running the ball into contact when they have a 3 player overlap, should in a player. Referees spend a lot of time and effort to give themselves the best chance of making good decisions. Working out in the gym, running kilometers, reading the Law, sitting in

on refereeing courses and workshops, talking with other referees and working with referee coaches all combine to make them better at refereeing.

Rugby's "Urban Legends"

Rugby has many myths.... things that players, fans and {blush} some referees believe to be true... but aren't. Here a few. Read the description and figure out what you believe the referee should decide. Is the legend true or a myth?

1) Situation: Your team has kicked the ball through the opposing back line. Their fullback and your winger are chasing the bouncing ball. The fullback slides down to the ground and grabs the ball just as your winger gets there. Your winger is on his feet and the fullback is lying on the ground, holding onto the ball. Your winger reaches down and rips the ball from the fullback's hands and sprints toward the goal line. The fullback's fans and teammates scream that "They have to let them get up to their feet!!"

Decision: Play on.... the Laws only say you may not fall over a player on the ground. As long as your winger stays on their feet and given the fullback a chance to play the ball, they can try to rip it from the fullback's arms. A player lying on the ground must release or pass the ball and so cannot prevent your winger from grabbing the ball. The fullback is not tackled (just lying on the ground) so there are no worries about the gate. (See Law 14)

2) Situation: A player wants to wear a knee brace. It has metal or plastic pieces in it but the player has wrapped it with tape and foam.

Decision: The player cannot play with the brace. Braces or padding cannot have any hard pieces in them at all. Some ankle braces that have plastic in them can be worn under the boot and the socks. (See Law 4)

3) Situation: A maul has formed and one of your opponents has managed to squeeze their way through and is latched onto the ball. As the maul spins they have ended up on your side of the ball. One of your props yells that the opponent is offside, grabs them by the jersey and pulls them from the maul.

Decision: Penalty against your prop for pulling the opponent out of the maul. The only off-side line is the last player's feet and as long as a player enters the maul from the back and has "gone through the middle", they are not off-side. The Law will not penalize an opponent who can move through the maul because your team can't bind well enough to seal them off. If they slide around the edges of the maul, they are liable to penalty. Also, the Law says you may not pull opponents from a maul... you can only bind and drive on them. (See Law 17)

4) After a brilliant 40m run, you manage to get a metre from your opponent's goal line. Your opponent's fullback and winger wrap you up and keep you on your feet. You do manage get your arms free enough to push the ball into the goal post pads about half way up. You start your signature celebration for the try.

Decision: Stop dancing and play on. To score a try, the ball must touch the goal post pad and the ground at the same time. So in fancy places with huge goal post pads (more room for sponsor's logos!) you can score a try while 30cm from the goal line. (See Law 22)