



Whistle Talk

News from the British Columbia Rugby Referees' Society

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From time to time the BCRRS is going to publish a newsletter containing discussions of the Laws of the Game and the impact they can have on playing the game in BC. As the IRB clarifies the Laws with its Policies and Ruling on the Law, it is hoped that the BCRRS newsletter will make the application of the Laws in BC clearer for officials, coaches, players and fans. For a copy of the current laws go to <http://www.irblaws.com/EN/downloads/>

Receivers at Line out time

In the past, teams have had plays where the receiver would move into the lineout and be boosted to catch the throw-in. They would sometimes have another player step out of the lineout to act as the receiver.

Law 19.8 (i) states that, if a team decides to have a receiver, this player must be 2m from the lineout when it begins... ie. when the ball leaves the hands of the thrower.

In 2009 the IRB was asked if the exception to Law 19.8 (i) meant that the receiver could move into the lineout to boost, catch the ball, etc.. The ruling was NO they could not enter the lineout until the ball is thrown. As it is virtually impossible for the receiver to move the 2m while the ball is in the air, receivers can no longer join the lineout. If the timing is perfect the receiver may be able to catch the ball thrown to the very back of the line out. (see <http://www.irblaws.com/EN/clarifications/> and look for Ruling #9)

Further to this law, the BCRRS has taken the position that IF a team forms its lineout with a receiver, there must be a receiver in place when the lineout begins. If for some reason they wish to have the original receiver move into the lineout, someone from the lineout must drop back into the receiver position and be 2m from the lineout when the ball is thrown. This creates a timing issue for the team as the shift must be completed before the ball is thrown. Note: this only applies for the team throwing the ball in... the defensive receiver cannot move into the lineout without creating a numbers issue.

At The Tackle

Often changes in the way the Game is officiated occur not because of changes in Law but rather because of the focus brought to a Law. The tackle Law is a good example of this.

Last season, the referees the southern hemisphere decided that they had not been focussing enough on the role of the tackler and how much they had been able to slow down the

game. The referees decided to officiate what happens at the tackle to the letter of the Law... thus the many “tackler not releasing” penalties in the early Super 14 season. This focus has now spread across the rugby world and into BC.

Law 15.4, 15.5 and 15.6 state the responsibilities of the tackler, ball carrier and other players arriving at the tackle. NOTE: by Law... the tackler is a player who took the ball carrier to the ground AND also went off their feet. Any player who does not go to ground with the ball carrier is NOT a tackler and is considered as an “other player coming to the tackle”

The net result of these Laws is that once a ball carrier has been tackled they must have a clear chance to play or release the ball. Before ANY defender may try to contest for the ball, the tackler must let go of the ball carrier and move away. Also any defenders who had a hold of the ball carrier or ball but did not go to ground (aka are secondary tacklers) must also let go of the ball and ball carrier before they contest for the ball from their side of the tackle... ie through the gate.

The “Dump/Spear” Tackle

The lifting of the ball carrier off of their feet and dropping or driving them into the ground has long been a part of the lore of rugby and though not mentioned in Law, probably always has been dangerous foul play. But since the fateful game between the British Lions and New Zealand, it's illegality has been enshrined in the Laws and had much impact on the game.

The Law has been re-written a couple of times but now reads:

Law 10.4 (j) Lifting a player from the ground and dropping or driving that player into the ground whilst that player's feet are still off the ground such that the player's head and/or upper body come into contact with the ground is dangerous play.

The BCRRS has taken the stance that erring on the side of caution and safety is the prudent path. As with most incidents of foul play there can be severe, medium or mild forms. Referees have been instructed that in the most severe and clear instances of dump tackles (ie. ball carrier lands on head & neck) they are to issue a red card. For milder forms (ie. ball carrier lands on shoulder or chest) they may choose to issue a yellow card or an admonishment and penalty.

NOTE: the intention of the tackling player or how injured the “dumped player” is or if the player drove or dropped the ball carrier are not important in the discussion, how the ball carrier arrives to the ground is the paramount importance.

This topic leads into a more general discussion of how referees deal with Foul Play; specifically dangerous play/misconduct (punching, high tackle, etc) and unfair play (intentionally offending, “cheating, etc)

Referees are trained to work with players, captains and coaches to create games that are fair, flowing and competitive...ie "let the players play". (We call it "game management"). Keeping "players on the park" is an unstated goal of referees.

If the referee witnesses an act of foul play (NOTE: this is an absolute requirement), they have several options in Law for dealing with it and the player(s) involved:

- admonishment: "chew the player out", get the Captain to talk to the player involved... especially if the other team gained advantage
- penalty or free kick: if no advantage gained... can be combined with a "chat"
- yellow card: (and 10min in sin bin), team plays 1 player down, player's name sent to the BCRU
- red card: player sent off, team plays 1 player down and a detailed report sent to the BCRU Discipline Committee

Though these options are in order of severity, there is no requirement that the referee work through them in that order. The referee has wide discretion on what actions to take... ie. "could go straight to red".

In deciding on a course of action, the primary factor is the act itself. As stated above a clear dump tackle onto the head leads to a red card, while a less dangerous tackle might lead only to penalty. All acts of foul play are considered in Law to be intentional.

Another factor could be the nature of the game. In a game where there have been several incidents of pushing and slapping "with purses" a referee may choose to admonish the players in the first incidents but issue a card to those in later incidents. Of course, in an otherwise non-confrontational game, a referee cannot give players, who hit each other with severe punches, a free pass ie the referee could issue red cards for what is essentially the first occurrence of foul play.

However, in general referees do not consider the ramifications of their disciplinary actions on the players... if a player commits an act that deserves a red card, the referee should not take into consideration the fact that the player may get a suspension from the BCRU that rules him out of the team's next game. The player should have considered the possible consequences before taking the actions they did. Any sanction on a player who is red carded (or cited) is the responsibility of the BCRU Discipline Committee. They have policies and procedures that insure fair treatment of the player. The only role taken by referees is to report the incident as they saw it.

If you have any topics for discussion in future BCRRS Whistle Talk issues or comments on the topics in this issue please e-mail them to Dpue1@shaw.ca.