

Next Level Football Officiating

DEFENSIVE PASS INTERFERENCE

1. Actions that constitute defensive pass interference include, but are not limited to, the following six categories:

- Early contact by a defender who is not playing the ball is defensive pass interference provided the other requirements for defensive pass interference have been met, regardless of how deep the pass is thrown to the receiver.
- Playing through the back of a receiver in an attempt to make a play on the ball.
- Grabbing and restricting a receiver's arm(s) or body in such a manner that restricts his opportunity to catch a pass.
- Extending an arm across the body (arm bar) of a receiver thus restricting his ability to catch a pass, regardless of the fact of whether or not the defender is looking for the ball.
- Cutting off or riding the receiver out of the path to the ball by making contact with him without playing the ball.
- Hooking and restricting a receiver in an attempt to get to the ball in such a manner that causes the receiver's body to turn prior to the ball arriving.

2. Develop a feel for the legality of contact.

When determining whether contact qualifies for an interference call, some officials employ a test similar to the block-charge distinction used by basketball officials. Did the offensive player charge into the contact, or is it a case of unavoidable contact that warrants a no-call? Still other officials think in terms of advantage-disadvantage when deciding whether contact should draw a flag. While those notions can give you a feel for the play and help build consistency in the way you call interference, do not rely on them to the exclusion of knowing and applying the rules.

3. Enforce a penalty only in those cases in which the contact involves an obvious intent to impede the opponent.

You will often see a play in which a defender has one arm across the receiver's back while his other arm reaches across to knock the pass away. Some officials (and most offensive coaches) incorrectly think that should automatically draw a flag for defensive pass interference. However, unless the defender uses the arm across the receiver's back to grasp, control, spin or slow the receiver,

let a good football play stand and keep the flag in your pocket. The same philosophy should apply any time a receiver and defender trip accidentally when their feet entangle. Don't make a cheap pass interference call when the contact is inadvertent or incidental to fair play.

Distinguish those examples of unavoidable or incidental contact, where a no-call is appropriate, from the type of play in which the defender knocks the pass away from a position directly behind the intended receiver. If the defender hits the opponent flush between the numbers when making a move to deflect the ball, defensive pass interference should be called. The penalty is legitimate because the defender could not have broken up the pass without going through the receiver's body.

Calls on pass interference can be tough, close calls. When a safety hits the receiver even a split second before the ball arrives, the contact is illegal. Make sure, though, that you actually see the interference; don't let crowd reaction influence you to call it.

4. Once the offense throws the ball, all eligible players on both teams have equal territorial rights to move toward, catch or deflect the pass.

Do not flag either side when there is a collision (unavoidable or incidental contact) between opponents who are both trying to catch, bat or otherwise make a play on the ball. Know a good, fair football play when you see it and don't ruin it with an unwarranted penalty.

A defender cannot exercise that right, however, if he is not looking for the pass. Thus, two things an official should consider in a potential defensive pass interference call are whether contact occurred and whether the defender was "playing the ball" (looking for it) or "playing the receiver" (looking at him) when the contact occurred. (In NCAA rules, the ball must also be catchable.)

There is no foul if a receiver and defender get "tangled feet" and both hit the ground, as long as both of them are looking for the ball; if one is playing the opponent and not the ball, he will draw a flag.

REFEREE.COM
YOUR SOURCE FOR EVERYTHING OFFICIATING

VISIT DAILY FOR UPDATED CONTENT