

Next Level Football Officiating

CATCH

1. Consider all external factors when ruling catch vs. no catch.

Sometimes players make a tough call for you. One example is an attempted diving or shoestring catch. If the receiver's shoulders slump, he expresses disgust verbally or otherwise indicates disappointment, he's telling you the pass was incomplete. Not that seeing him jump up and "show you the ball" automatically means he caught it. But lack of that or a similar gesture is a pretty good clue.

A spray of those tiny black rubber pellets on a turf field, a splash of water on a wet day or a poof of dirt on a dry track may also be helpful.

2. In order to complete a catch, a player must touch the ground while he is in control of the ball.

If the ball is lost after the receiver has touched the ground, due to contact or not, it should be ruled an incomplete pass instead of a fumble unless the receiver has clearly demonstrated complete control of the ball. Complete control is indicated by taking a step, tucking the ball away or some other action ordinarily associated with running with the ball.

3. The umpire can be extremely helpful in determining a catch or trap.

Some high school umpires continue to watch the action in the line after a pass is thrown, sometimes for several seconds, whereas collegiate umpires are taught to pivot the instant the pass is off so as to help the wing and deep officials with catch or trap plays over the middle. Indeed, a catch or trap 10 yards from the line of scrimmage and in the middle of the field is one of the toughest calls to deal with. An alert umpire who spins when the pass is thrown can save the crew by making the call himself or helping another official who has to try to make the call while looking through the receiver's back.

4. When in doubt, the pass was trapped rather than caught.

If it is not certain a catch was made, it is an incomplete pass. The covering official can be guided by the position of the receiver's hands. If his hands are under the ball, the likelihood that it's a catch is increased. At least one official must observe the ball possessed by a player without it having touched the ground.

5. The official who is closest to play may not always have the best look when judging catch/no catch.

The official who is closest may be so close he is not be able to see the whole picture. An official who may be a little farther away can see the whole picture and may have the best look to determine a catch or no catch. Think of taking a group picture with a camera without a zoom lens; you have to back up away from the group of people to get everyone in the photo.

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