

Next Level Football Officiating

HOLDING

1. Actions that constitute offensive holding include but are not limited to the following six categories:

- **Tackle.** A tackle as a block is most likely to occur as part of a block below the waist at the line. It is also an act of desperation by an offensive lineman badly beaten by a defender.
- **Takedown.** A takedown is often fairly obvious. It may momentarily look like a wrestling match. A size mismatch between blocker and rusher increases the probability of a takedown. A factor to keep in mind is that backfield pass blockers are often smaller than defensive linemen, making the need for an “equalizing” technique more probable.
- **Pullover.** The pullover almost always occurs on a pass play. The offensive lineman grabs his opponent at the armpits or chest plate of the shoulder pads and then pulls him over himself, making it look like the defender ran over his blocker and fell down in the process.
- **Hook and resist.** In order to hook an opponent, the blocker must allow his hands to get outside the frame of his body. That is usually easily discernible. For a foul to occur, that act must result in a restriction that affects the play. If the defender immediately blows through the extended arm, no holding has occurred.

- **Grab and restrict.** If the defender beats his blocker, the blocker may grab the defender's jersey as he is moving away. The jersey grab can be subtle or patently obvious.
- **Jerk and restrict.** This type of hold begins with two hands on the opponent's chest. After contact is made, the blocker slides his hands up under the opponent's shoulder pads and grabs the jersey. With that firm grasp, the blocker jerks the opponent aside or moves him away from the point of attack, thus delaying his advance.

2. Defensive holding is generally limited to four types:

- **Pull and shoot.** That tactic used by defensive players (usually linemen) is designed to create a gap in the offensive line. The defensive lineman grabs the offensive lineman and pulls him to one side, allowing a teammate to rush through the opening and rush the quarterback or block a kick.
- **Holding a pulling lineman.** In order to prevent the offense from setting up the blocking in front of a screen pass or sweep, a defensive player (usually a lineman) will hold a pulling lineman. It often shows up as a shirt-grab or outright tackle.
- **Holding on a chip block.** That hold begins when an offensive lineman fires out at the snap and legally blocks the defensive lineman (usually but not always a nose guard) below the waist. An adjacent offensive lineman will either fire out or chip

block the nose guard, trying to work his way to the second level of defense, usually a linebacker. If the defensive lineman holds the adjacent lineman, he prevents the lineman from getting to the linebacker.

- **Holding an eligible receiver.** A defensive end will sometimes hold the tight end, preventing the receiver from getting off the line to execute a block or get into a pass pattern. Cornerbacks in press coverage are also known to latch onto wide receivers.

3. If there is a potential offensive holding but the action occurs clearly away from the point of attack and has no (or could have no) effect on the play, offensive holding should not be called.

The runner hits the right side, makes it through the line and gains enough for a first down. But action that qualifies as holding occurs on the opposite side of the line, away from the point of attack.

Was there a rules violation? You bet. Should a flag be thrown? Yes, if officials were inclined to throw the flag for every single violation committed in the game. That, no doubt, would result in a long day for players, coaches and fans. But officials must embrace the advantage/disadvantage philosophy. Color that play gray.

When considering holding, if the offensive player's act cannot be described using one of the six categories of holding, think twice before throwing the flag. Likewise, if the questionable block is on a player who could not reasonably make the tackle, a verbal warning is in order.

4. If there is a potential for defensive holding but the action occurs clearly away from the point of attack and has no (or could have no) effect on the play, defensive holding should not be called.

The philosophy regarding defensive holding is similar to that of offensive holding. If a receiver is held but the quarterback never looks in his direction, or if the hold is on the side of the field clearly opposite from the side on which the play is run, you can likely pass on it. The most common defensive hold is the "pull and shoot" on scoring kicks. The lineman will grab the offensive lineman and pull him aside, allowing a teammate to dart through the opening to block the kick. That should be called every time.

5. Watch the defender's feet to determine if there is a hold.

Holding is as much a foul of omission as commission. A blocker who fails to move his feet often finds himself needing to

grab the defender in order to prevent the defender's movement and advance.

At the snap, watch the initial charge of the defense and the reaction of the offense. If you observe an offensive player grasping an opponent, shift your focus to the blocker's feet. If he stops moving his feet, he likely is holding to compensate. If the defender is faster or stronger than the blocker, the blocker usually has no choice but to hold.

Blockers who have poor footwork or are out of position are going to hold because they get caught flat-footed. But if the blocker is able to keep his feet, keep his body between the defender and the runner and does not have to resort to leverage in order to repel the defender, the block is likely legal.

6. Holding can be called even if the quarterback is subsequently sacked as it may be the other half of an offset foul.

Some officials think that calling holding when the quarterback is sacked or the runner is downed behind the line is "piling on," or adding insult to injury. In fact, it is an insurance policy. If a different official has a flag down for a live-ball foul by the defense, the penalties will offset. If the hold is not called and the only flag is for a foul by the defense, the defense will not only be deprived of its great play but will be penalized.

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