

Next Level Football Officiating

PASSING

1. When in doubt if a pass is forward or backward, rule it forward.

When a pass is thrown, it's not always easy to draw an imaginary line from the passer to the receiver. An uncaught backward pass may be recovered and advanced by either team. So ruling it backward when it could go either way actually benefits the defense. Calling it an incomplete forward pass is fair to both teams; the offense can't gain yardage and the defense benefits because the offense has used up one of its downs.

2. When in question on action against the passer, it is roughing the passer if the defender's intent is to punish.

Remember the prime criteria is whether the contact was unavoidable and part of a legitimate effort to tackle a player holding the ball. If the defender is within one step of the passer, in almost all cases he does not have enough time to react to the release of the ball and legitimate contact should be excused. At the other end of the spectrum is the rusher who is three steps or more away from the passer. In that case, it is clear the defender has enough time to avoid contact.

A defender who is two steps away forces the referee to exercise his judgment. Could the contact have been avoided? In making that decision, it is prudent to consider not only whether the defender had control of his feet, but also the control of his arms. In other words, was he truly trying to make a tackle and couldn't stop, or was he trying to deliver a blow or otherwise inflict punishment upon the offensive player?

If the referee believes the defender dove at the opponent's knees for a purpose other than tackling him, it's a foul. Likewise, any forearm or shoulder to the head should be considered illegal.

3. A late flag when ruling officiating intentional grounding is the optimum procedure.

Two essential elements — duress and the lack of eligible offensive receivers in the area where the pass is thrown — drive the mechanics that make a late flag the optimum procedure. The referee's primary focus is on the quarterback. If there is duress on the play, the referee must stay with the quarterback a bit longer than usual to ensure that player is not fouled. The opportunity for the referee to watch the flight of the pass is extremely limited. That will only happen if the pass is thrown away from the referee and remains within his field of vision.

Consequently, the referee will always know if the pass was released under duress, but will rarely know if there was an eligible

offensive receiver in the area where the ball was thrown. That means unless the ball was spiked to the ground for an obvious foul, the referee will not have all the information necessary to throw his flag. For those plays to be called properly, the referee can be assisted by any member of the crew who should run in immediately and tell the referee if the ball went into an area devoid of eligible team A receivers. The referee will then throw a late flag.

4. The referee should drop back the same number of steps as the quarterback drops back.

The referee wants to keep everything in his line of sight. By dropping back with the quarterback, the referee is always the same distance away from the quarterback with his actions and can see the whole picture of the field.

5. If an interception is near the goalline (inside the one yardline) and there is a question as to whether possession is gained in the field of play or end zone, make the play a touchback.

Team B has just made a great play by intercepting a pass deep in its own territory. To make that team start a new series on or inside its own one yard line effectively negates that play. Also,

starting a play at the 20 yard line takes some pressure off you, since you won't spend the next play(s) on the ensuing drive having to decide if a runner was tackled inside or outside his own end zone.



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