

## End Zone

By Charlie Clements

It is interesting to look at some of the rules which were in effect during the infancy of football. A rule put in effect in 1917 prohibited substitutes from talking to players on the field until after one play. Can you imagine this today as a lot of teams send in plays through the use of a substitute?

In 1926, a penalty of five yards and loss of the down was assessed for an incomplete pass after the first one in a series. Helmets were required in 1935 and, in 1936, the rule prohibiting a substitute from communicating until after one play was repealed.

One may ask how are the rules changed? A rule change proposal is submitted to the state [? WVSSAC] office for consideration and then forwarded to the National Federation of State High School Associations' office in Indianapolis. The rules proposals are then presented to one of five sub-committees for consideration at the national rules committee meeting in January each year.

The rules, which are passed by the sub-committee, are then submitted to the full rules committee for consideration. Each of the 48-member states has one vote, as well as one each from the National Federation of Football Officials and the National Federation of Football Coaches. That makes a total of 50 votes on the committee.

The editorial committee then refines the rules passed by the rules committee before they are published in the rulebook for the next season. Each year, there are approximately 60 proposals presented to the rules committee. Of those 60, the sub-committees will present approximately 15-20 to the full committee. Only three or four will pass in a normal year. However, this past year, there were 11 changes approved, most of them minor.

In the last article, we looked at the free blocking zone and discussed the limitations on blocking in the free blocking zone. The term "crack-back" block is a reference to a block, usually from a wide receiver, who is outside the free blocking zone back toward the spot from which the ball was snapped.

This blocker is not permitted to block below the waist or from behind because he was not in the zone at the snap. Therefore, the block must not be in the back and must be above the waist. This action usually happens when there is a sweep to the blockers' side of the formation. I have seen situations where there was the appearance of a potential "crack-back" block. But, just prior to the contact, the player being blocked turned to move toward the runner and was immediately contacted by the blocker. Once again, as stated in the previous column, the official needs to see the complete action, not just the end of it.

This leads us to another area where the official needs to see the complete action before calling a penalty: illegal helmet contact. There are three types of illegal helmet contact referred to in the rules.

Butt blocking is an act by an offensive or defensive player who initiates contact

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against an opponent, who is not the ball carrier, with the front of his helmet. Face tackling is an act by a defensive player who initiates contact with a ball carrier with the front of his helmet. Spearing, the most dangerous of the three, is an act by an offensive or defensive player against any opponent with the top of his helmet.

While the helmet has been designed to protect the player, it was not intended to be a weapon. We went through a period of time when some coaches were teaching their players to “stick the helmet to him.” This type of helmet contact resulted in several players suffering catastrophic neck and spinal cord injuries and in some cases resulting in death.

It was most often the player who initiated the contact who suffered the injury. Spearing is often seen when a player dives into a group of players on the ground or when a defensive back “attacks” a receiver with the top of the helmet. In 1975, spearing was defined as a disqualifying foul. The disqualifying designation has since been rescinded.

If the spear is deemed to be intentional or flagrant, the player may be ejected. Officials must be alert to penalize any illegal helmet contact, as this is a major safety issue. While the penalty will not prevent injuries, it will discourage the continued use of the tactic. In watching college and NFL football on TV, we are seeing an increasing number of “illegal helmet contact” fouls being called.

In the next column, we will look at the timing rules.



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