

Pass Interference

1. We always try to make a formation correct. If a wideout is a little too close to being either off the line when he should be on the line, or on the line covering another eligible but should be off, try to make him what he is supposed to be. A key to deciding if this is a foul is to watch that wide guy closely. If he checks with you, tell him what you think he is. Example: "You are on the line, or you are a back." That is not coaching.

2. Avoid coaching a player by telling him to move up or get back. They may be doing something intentionally, like covering the inside eligible to create more blocking for a power run. Or they may be going to shift into another offensive set.

3. Pass interference is not that difficult. It is usually out in the open and involves only two players. There has to be contact. The high school rule has changed and face guarding is now legal. How often do you see PI where there is contact below the waist? Almost never. Therefore feel confident in watching any contact between the top of the pants up to the neck area. This is where PI will occur.

4. The tough call is when there is contact but it is legal. As an example, if there is contact by the defender but it does not change the route of the receiver nor impede his progress to the ball it is most likely not PI. In order to have PI you should be able to verbalize what happened. For example, "the defender used an arm bar to keep the receiver from reaching for the ball. Or the receiver pushed off as he went into his break to create separation."

5. Each team has a right to go for the ball when it is in the air. Sometimes there is a hard collision just as the ball reaches both players. But this does not mean there is a foul involved. The offensive coaches and most fans think the onus is always on the defense. Not true. Often this is a no-call.

6. There is no PI behind the LOS. On a short wheel route the offense may block the defense while the ball is in the air. The defense may push the intended receiver in an attempt to get to the ball. However, neither team may hold or commit another illegal use of hands foul. This most often would occur when the defense tackles a would-be receiver in the offensive backfield.

7. When reporting a PI make sure you know the result of the play. The result of a completed pass may trump the penalty since in high school there is no automatic first down for a PI foul.

8. Restrictions on the defense begin when the ball is in the air. So if you see contact by the defense against an eligible receiver you have to take a quick look to see if the pass has been thrown. You may still have illegal use of the hands but not PI. A defender may legally contact a receiver on the front of the jersey until the ball is thrown. Then it is complete hands off. But if at anytime the receiver gets laterally equal (on same yard line) as the defender the defense may not contact the receiver on the side or in the back. This is a form of illegal use of the hands. Your judgement comes into play if you think this impedance is worthy of a flag for defensive holding. Example: the QB fades to pass, but the defense restricts the receiver so he can't get open. Was this enough to cause the QB to get sacked or have to scramble? Another example: The defense shoves the eligible receiver on the side of the shoulder pad after the receiver has occupied the same yardline as the defender. This causes the receiver to stumble or have to veer off a bit. Now the QB throws the pass in the vicinity of this receiver but it is incomplete. Foul?

9. The tight end is frequently the culprit in offense pass interference (OPI). They love to take a few steps inside and break out. Be sure to watch their inside arm. This is the way they create separation. Is this a foul? Usually if the defender loses a step due to the shove it is a foul. The reason is that not only does the defender lose a step but the receiver actually gains a step. So this creates two step separation. Who usually has this call? BJ!

10. Perhaps the toughest call is the pick play by the offense. Certainly a member of the offense has a right to his place on the field. If the outside guy goes in and the inside guy goes out they are going to try to "rub" the defense. Again, the offense has a right to run a pass route. The thing to watch for is any deviation from a route. If the offensive player quickly changes direction to head toward a defender you need to think of him as a suspect. If the offensive player reaches toward the defender with arms and hands that will alert you to the possibility there is an illegal pick.

Submitted by Bob Gordon