

Contact Above The Shoulders

For the 2012-13 season the NFHS Rules Committee issued a Point of Emphasis (POE) on contact above the shoulders. The POE defined illegal contact from a moving elbow where such contact was above the shoulders as being either an intentional foul or a flagrant one. This guidance regarding these play situations was provided in connection with the continuing emphasis on reducing concussions and decreasing excessive contact situations. It also helped to bring the results of such plays in high school games more in line with what is defined at the NCAA and pro levels.

IAABO, in its role supporting the NFHS Basketball Rules Committee, has provided a question in this area on the refresher exam. This question hopes to refresh the official's understanding and to promote discussion in this area for the coming season.

Question #13 read, "A1, while being closely guarded, swings his/her elbows not excessively and contacts B-1 above the shoulders. The official rules an intentional personal foul. Is the official correct?"

This question should be answered as "Yes."

Last season the Point of Emphasis (POE) distinguished between two varieties of such contact. When illegal contact above the shoulders is not the result of elbow and/or arm movement that is excessive, then the contact is to be ruled as intentional. This means that this illegal contact should have resulted from moves that are consistent with the game of basketball. An example of this could be a play situation involving an outlet pass after a rebound. If a player had chinned the ball and then turned to make an outlet pass with his/her elbow leading the way, this could result in contact with an opponent. Previously such contact may have resulted in a player control foul being ruled. With the guidance provided by Rules Committee, if such contact is above the shoulders, the result should be an intentional foul being ruled.

In situations where the illegal contact is the result of excessively swinging arms and/or elbows, the ruling should normally be a flagrant foul unless the contact was judged to be slight. Examples of this include play situations where a player is trapped by more than one opponent and the player attempts to create space by rapidly swinging his/her arms and elbows. When such actions result in contact with an opponent above the shoulders, this contact should result in a flagrant foul being ruled. Another example would be a player "throwing an elbow." In the past such contact would always have been ruled an intentional foul. With the guidance provided by last season's POE, if such contact is above the shoulders, then a flagrant foul should now be the result instead.

Some questions have been raised regarding the fact that the Rules Committee has not provided play situations in the Case Book. While such play situations may be helpful to remind an official of his/her responsibilities in these situations, the lack thereof does not negate last season's POE.

Many actions are not specifically listed in any rule of the Rules Book. For example, over the years there are specific aspects of handchecking that have only been referred to in the POE section of the Rules Book. Continuous contact by a hand or an arm on a ball handler is one such example. This has long been classified as a handchecking foul although specific language defining this does not exist in the Rules Book or Case Book.

It should also be noted that with regard to intentional fouls, specific language in Rule 4



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